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# ‘The Healing Hand Laid on a Great Wound:’ The Elberfeld System and the Transformation of Poverty in Germany, Britain, and the United States

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‘The Healing Hand Laid on a Great Wound:’ The Elberfeld System and the Transformation of  
Poverty in Germany, Britain, and the United States

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirement for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in History

by

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## Abstract

This dissertation employs a transnational analysis to focus on historical perceptions of poverty and the development of private and public welfare in the modern era. This research places the emergence of early poverty relief schemes within a broader transatlantic context by studying the relationships among social reformers in Germany, Great Britain, and the United States. This work has two primary objectives. First, it focuses on the Elberfeld Poor Relief System a nineteenth and early twentieth century German innovation emphasizing local poor relief and community responsibility, which transformed poor relief into an efficient structure. Second, the Elberfeld System was instrumental in influencing the management of poor relief in other nations, such as Great Britain and the United States, and studying these transnational connections demonstrates the historical contingency of poverty. While scholars on German welfare and poverty emphasize the role the Elberfeld System had on poor relief management, the prevailing narrative has relegated it to a status of under importance. Furthermore, the Elberfeld System was not only applied extensively throughout Germany, it had a direct impact over the ways individuals in England and America sought to curtail poverty's effects. Each country developed unique poor relief organizations and systems conducive to themselves and their national setting. Yet the specific historical study of each individualized system, while having merit, is too narrowly focused thus missing larger transnational connections. This work demonstrates how private and localized poor relief aided in negotiating the shift to national welfare systems in the twentieth century. While this approach will demonstrate the historical attitudes towards poverty and its management, it will also illuminate how the evolution of poor relief, the development of the welfare state, and the shifting view of the very idea of poverty, were informed at every stage not simply by states and national institutions, but by transnational trends, ideas, and encounters.

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## Introduction

In 1871, Andrew Doyle, a British government inspector, arrived in Germany at the request of Parliament to examine the so-called Elberfeld System, a German form of poor-relief named after the town in which it first appeared in 1853. The previous two decades had seen the System implemented in dozens of German cities, catching the attention of both American and British authorities for its ability to transform poverty on a local level through an efficient approach rooted in the building of personal relationships between the impoverished and state and community providers. Thus, at a time of British economic and industrial dominance, Andrew Doyle came to a newly-united German nation-state, then just beginning to spread its industrial wings, in order to see whether the Elberfeld System might be effective in tackling the problem of poverty in the United Kingdom. In his report, Doyle argued that after surveying the inner workings of this modern System and its malleable nature he believed that its principles “cannot fail to be of great value” to England.<sup>1</sup>

Doyle’s mission is but one example of a common, yet understudied, process of transnational exchange and cooperation in matters of poor relief, which were inseparable from the emerging trends of industrialization and indispensable to the formation of modern welfare states. As the case of the Elberfeld System shows, strategies for dealing with poverty -- and for that matter notions of what poverty was and why it persisted -- were by no means confined to any one national space. If scholars have thus far largely overlooked this transnational dynamic, it is because they have focused to such a great degree on the development of state-based welfare systems. Within the German context, for instance, the primary focus has rested on understanding the origins of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck’s social insurance legislation of the 1880s. For decades it was

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<sup>1</sup> British Parliamentary Papers, 1872 [C. 516] Local Government Report, *First Annual Report* (1871-1872), “The Poor Law System of Elberfeld” Report from Andrew Doyle, Esq., 244.

believed that this system was the nexus point for understanding how the issue of welfare assumed a preponderance in contemporary politics.<sup>2</sup> While historians did not reject the notion that poor relief existed before Bismarck's enterprises, they simply embraced the perception that poor relief and charity remained confined to private, traditional practices. Many have assumed, as historian Young Sun-Hong has explained, that these early forms of poor relief, "perpetuated their anachronistic existence until they were rendered superfluous by social insurance and social welfare systems in the twentieth century."<sup>3</sup> As historians have explored, however, they have begun to discover that poor-relief schemes earlier in the nineteenth century were surprisingly complex and influential for later political, economic, and social developments.<sup>4</sup> Yet this changing literature continues to miss one critical dimension, which concerns the ways in which the evolution of poor relief, the development of the welfare state, and the shifting view of the very idea of poverty, were informed at every stage by dynamic transnational trends, ideas, and encounters.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The oldest discussions on the Bismarck's motivations and political maneuverings for the passage of social insurance come from William Harbutt Dawson *Bismarck and State Socialism*, (London, 1891) and Walter Sulzbach *German Experience with Social Insurance*, (New York, 1947). Historical reassessments have come from Martin Geyer, *Die Reichsknappschaft: Versicherungsreformen und Sozialpolitik im Bergbau 1900-1945*, (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1987), Greg Eghigian *Making Security Social: Disability, Insurance, and the Birth of the Social Entitlement State in Germany*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), and E.P. Hennock, *The Origin of the Welfare State in England and Germany, 1850-1914: Social Policies Compared*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Young-Sun Hong, *Welfare, Modernity, and the Weimar State, 1919-1933*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 19; See also Larry Frohman, *Poor Relief and Welfare in Germany from the Reformation to World War I*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 142.

<sup>4</sup> See Christoph Sachße and Florian Tennstedt, *Geschichte der Armenfürsorge in Deutschland*, 3 vols. (Kohlhammer, 1980-92); George Steinmetz, *Regulating the Social: The Welfare State and Local Politics in Imperial Germany*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Larry Frohman, *Poor Relief and Welfare in Germany from the Reformation to World War I*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Most existing works take comparative approach to investigate the passage of national legislation rather than understanding them as part of a larger shared dynamic. See Gerhard A. Ritter's *Sozialversicherung in Deutschland und England. Entstehung und Grundzüge im Vergleich*, (Munich: C.H. Beck Verlag, 1983); Michael B. Katz and Christoph Sachße, *The Mixed Economy of Social Welfare: Public/Private Relations in England, Germany, and the United States, the 1870s to the 1930s*, (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1996); E.P. Hennock, *The Origin of the Welfare State in England and Germany, 1850-1914: Social Policies Compared*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Axel Schäfer, *American Progressives and German Social Reform, 1875-1920: Social Ethics, Moral Control, and the Regulatory State in a Transatlantic Context*, (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000). Little research has been done regarding the role of local or municipal relief between Germany and Great Britain or Germany and the United States. The major exception is Daniel Rodgers's seminal work *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* which is the best example of exploring the transnational connections between European and



This work sheds light on the transnational history of poverty and welfare by examining the ways in which German, American, and British policy makers looked to the Elberfeld System as a model for solving the so-called ‘Social Question’ (*Sozialfrage*) that emerged in the nineteenth century and carried into the twentieth. In tracing the emergence and application of the Elberfeld System across Germany, the project explains how the System influenced the management of poor relief in Great Britain and the United States. This work demonstrates that this local relief scheme continued to serve as a main source of amelioration in over fifty German cities by the end of the First World War. Indeed, the Elberfeld System’s ubiquity and longevity complicates the historical argument that poor relief was “too localized and fragmented to permit generalizations about national developments.”<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, the transnational allure of the Elberfeld System had a direct impact over the ways individuals in America and Britain sought to mitigate poverty’s effects and reveals the slippage between the uniqueness of state and national frameworks for tackling poverty on the one hand and the global transformation of capital, labor, and poverty on the other. Appreciating these distinctions demands an approach that assesses the transfers among industrializing countries in the nineteenth century and considers the mechanisms by which ideas about welfare, and about poverty relief, moved across national borders and between the divides between private and public institutions. In this way, viewing the poverty management regimes in the three major industrial powers of the era will further our understanding of the globalizing forces that formed modern welfare systems and shaped changing views of poverty in the West.

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American welfare policies. However, his work fails to adequately address the role the Elberfeld System had on American social reformers and poor relief.

<sup>6</sup> Hong, *Welfare, Modernity, and the Weimar State*, 16.

As an area for historical analysis the study of poverty and social welfare in Germany during the nineteenth century through the Weimar Republic has a seminal place within the larger historiography of modern Germany. For many years, however, social welfare and poor relief were marginalized or included only as a small and insignificant part within the larger metanarrative of the nineteenth century. The primary focus for historians was devoted to understanding the origins of Bismarckian social insurance legislation as the seminal precursor to further welfare state developments. As scholars sought to find the origins of the German welfare state, they have discovered that this understanding is both inaccurate and too simplistic producing a distorted account.<sup>7</sup> Nineteenth century poor relief was vital to helping shape German social, political, and economic issues. The development of new social classes, such as the liberal middle-class and the working-class, changed the management of poor relief at the local and municipal levels that then, in turn, shaped larger national policies passed in the 1880s.

This project aims to build upon the existing studies on nineteenth century German poor relief by demonstrating that poverty was a historically contingent phenomenon that transcended national boundaries in which a variety of social and intellectual factors shaped who societies considered to be poor, what factors lead to this designation, and what level of care was deemed necessary to aid those in such a condition. While many scholars on German welfare and poverty emphasize the role the Elberfeld System had on poor relief management, the prevailing narrative has failed to integrate its role into the broader history of poverty and poor relief, particularly its place within a transnational dynamic.<sup>8</sup> The Elberfeld System functioned as a paragon for

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<sup>7</sup> Larry Frohman, *Poor Relief and Welfare in Germany*, 142.

<sup>8</sup> See Christoph Sachße and Florian Tennstedt. *Geschichte der Armenfürsorge in Deutschland* Bd. 1, Vom Spätmittelalter bis zum 1. Weltkrieg, (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1980), Pg 214-22. 283-89, Bernd Weisbrod, "Wohltätigkeit und symbolische Gewalt in der Frühindustrialisierung. Städtische Armut und Armenpolitik im Wuppertal," in Hans Mommsen and Winfried Schulze, eds., *Vom Elend der Handarbeit: Probleme historischer Unterschichtenforschung*, (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), Barbara Lube "Mythos und Wirklichkeit des Elberfelder Systems," in Karl-Hermann Beeck and Rolf Becker, eds., *Gründerzeit: Versuch einer Grenzbestimmung im*

modernizing poor relief and described by its admirers as an enlightened form of charity predicated on principles of rationalization and bureaucratization. Its adaptability to various locations and its operation based on the interaction of poor relief volunteers with the indigent fostered a new relationship between the two that would influence the management of poverty into the twentieth century. While the establishment of social insurance in the 1880s would create a national relationship between the state and workers, it is the Elberfeld System that would remain the primary combatant of poverty on the local level until the Weimar Republic.

Furthermore, this work draws transnational connections between the Elberfeld System and its influence upon the English and American poor relief efforts. Not only applied extensively throughout Germany, the Elberfeld System had a direct impact over the ways individuals in England and America sought to mitigate poverty's effects through the avenue of the Charity Organization Society (COS). While each country developed unique poor relief organizations and systems conducive to their national setting and the specific historical study of each individualized system has historical merit, it does however become too narrowly focused causing scholars to miss larger transnational exchanges. For example, within the German, English, and American welfare states there are 'transfers' that spread among these nations, allowing them to form their own individual welfare systems. English and American charities, like the COS, and social reformers used the Elberfeld System to better their own systems. Studying how 'transfers' of this system crossed over to these countries, therefore, unearths a new understanding of poverty. Viewing each country's management of poverty across permeable borders will enable my research to probe into the possibility of the Western world's welfare system as a product of globalization without cultural prejudice. While the transfers are both ideological and tangible in application, the fact that

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*Wuppertal: Abhandlungen und Spezialbibliographie*, (Köln: Rheinland-Verlag, 1984), 158-184, and George Steinmetz, *Regulating the Social*.

individuals from each nation saw merit in the German system demonstrates its significance and that the effects of poverty show significant similarities regardless of national circumstance.

The Elberfeld System represents a bridge between older traditional views of poverty that had dominated since the Middle-Ages and newer more complex views which emerged in the nineteenth century as a result of industrial development and economic changes. The older view of poverty understood the condition to operate in a dichotomy between the deserving and the undeserving poor. The deserving poor were those individuals who had fallen upon hard times due to factors beyond their control. These factors were typically those related to the natural progressions of life such as old age, disability, sickness, widowhood, or becoming orphaned. These conditions were treated communally through provisions being given directly to those in need by the wealthy or through Church distributions. Depending upon the severity of the condition some of these deserving poor could be sent to institutions like hospitals or orphanages. The existence of the deserving poor within society was accepted as a reality and little was done to prevent their existence as their management was maintained on a communal level. The deserving poor's existence also fit within Christian doctrine that "the poor are always with us." The undeserving poor were those individuals who were impoverished as a result of actions or decisions made on their own such as being able to work but choosing not to. This group were ineligible for any kinds of relief given that their condition was due to their own flawed nature. It was believed that giving the undeserving poor any relief would only encourage their behavior and begin to believe that relief was a right. If anything, the community's responsibility was to place those undeserving poor into an institution which would try and reform their behavior and return them to the straight and narrow. These institutions, such as poorhouses or workhouses, were supposed to be so unappealing that only the most undeserving would find themselves as inmates inside their walls.

The categorization between deserving and undeserving poor enabled a clear delineation between who was justified in receiving aid and who should be punished or reformed for their behavior. It helped to distinguish how and what kind of relief would be warranted. It was always the undeserving poor which brought significant alarm to the minds of the well-to-do. Their presence should be kept at a minimum and their treatment should be harsh so as to demonstrate to other members of the lower-classes what awaited them if they chose to go down such a path. Furthermore, it was believed that the undeserving poor weakened the fabric of society and if left unchecked their presence could fester like a disease.

In the nineteenth century, the Western world experienced a radical altering within the structure of society, brought about by a series of intellectual, scientific, economic, and political revolutions. These events, and the ideas that flourished with them, reshaped the makeup of Europe. Economically and politically, fostered by the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution, countries developed into capitalistic economies enabling the transition of early modern monarchical powers into modern democratic states. Enlightenment ideas encouraged reason, individualism, and basic rights bestowed upon humanity. However, the new social order created class awareness and as capitalist markets assumed primacy, class consciousness became the distinguishing feature between individuals.

This altering of social, political, and economic life within the Western world began to transform how poverty was understood and while the dichotomy of deserving and undeserving poor never went away it was infused with the reality that industrial capitalism produced a new type of poverty. Poverty was a paradox for liberals who were forced to reconcile their adherence to laissez-faire principles with the reality that it produced unequal results. Industrial workers were tied to the economy in ways they had never been before. When fluctuations in the market occurred,

such as recessions or the enactment of tariffs, it meant that an individual's existence was thrown into jeopardy. Concerns over the lower-classes presented an ever-present problem to nineteenth century thinkers. Most of them understood the Social Question as an unsettling product of modernity. The world was changing at such a rapid pace that its byproduct, uncertainty, hit at the crux of individual lives. The ideas that established the new socio-political order of the nineteenth century linked itself with the positive notion of open-ended progress, brought on by the Enlightenment and advances in science and technology. Yet the positive nature of progress did not always translate into happiness and certainty for the average individual in the nineteenth century. Instead, progress and modernity was extremely jarring and often caused people to question open ended progress. Also, the Social Question was the product of industrial development, massive population growth, occupational freedom, and the ineffectiveness of European governments to handle these changes. The answer was to find a way to manage all those individuals who were impacted by its effects. Concerns over riots, unrest in industrial cities, the growing appeal of socialism, and worries over health and disease, encouraged nineteenth century politicians and social reformers find solutions to society's ills while continuing to normalize and valorize the inherent traits of the upper- and middle-classes as standards by which to judge society.

The Elberfeld System was understood by its practitioners and admirers as an enlightened form of charity and reflected two prominent contemporary modes of thought. First, the system embodied classical liberal principles of individual sovereignty. Notions of autonomy transformed the responsibility placed on individuals in that they were accountable for their conduct to fellow humans and to God. These ideas had a tremendous impact on the perceptions toward poverty in that the idea of work reflected one's self-worth. Working hard meant that an individual was staying on the straight and narrow and was fulfilling Christian ideals of hard work. This idea held the

premise that work would ensure protection from poverty. Additionally, the idea of the autonomous individual allowed the indigent to be understood as having become poor as a direct consequence of unscrupulous life choices. Since the individual was now in control of his own fate and his actions were to determine this fate, he was expected to take charge of his conduct. The second principle that the Elberfeld System reflected was that of idealism which asserted a collective responsibility for the common good of society. Since individual sovereignty left little room for poverty being a consequence of circumstances out of the individual's control idealism helped those bourgeois social reformers committed to laissez-faire practices find a way to rationalize increased interference with the consequences of an unrestricted market's fluctuations. The Elberfeld System required active participation among society's members to ensure the common good of all and try to solve social problems while also holding the autonomous individual's life choices as central to their relationship to poverty.

Germany, Great Britain, and the United States are three areas that are uniquely suited for comparison and therefore foster an investigation on how the circulation of an idea regarding poor relief can transcend national boundaries. By the second half of the nineteenth century these three nations reigned as industrial, economic, and imperialistic leaders of the Western world. Their industrial dominance meant that while they were competitors, they also experienced the same effects of industrialization which meant they had similar problems. While each nation has unique features of their respective political and social characters, they do share common responses to issues of social policy in the nineteenth century. Germany, Great Britain, and the U.S. all adapted from agrarian to industrial societies which illuminated the weaknesses of conventional poor relief practices when urban poverty became a major feature of industrial life. Additionally, while industrial and imperialistic competition characterized each of the nations it also fostered a sense

of anxiety and fear about the threat degeneration played among the lower-classes and what actions needed to be taken to protect the nation from declining. The affect of larger forces such the Panic of 1873 further linked these nations together demonstrating the weakness of traditional poor relief measures. Ultimately, throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries these three nations experienced a shift from older approaches to poor relief to more complex and bureaucratically organized practices that helped lay the foundation for more comprehensive welfare measures.

This work begins by investigating the history of relief measures taken in Europe and the United States beginning in the Middle Ages until 1850. While covering a substantial portion of time, this chapter investigates the major characteristics of poor relief before the Protestant Reformation, the shift in methods as a result of the tumultuous events in the sixteenth century, and the shift in practices in the wake of the Enlightenment and early Industrial Revolution through the ‘Age of Pauperism’ in the 1830s. This section demonstrates that while the means by which individuals and locales managed poverty changed over time, their perceptions of the poor and their understanding of the problem of poverty remained largely the same over many centuries. It also illuminates the uniqueness of America’s relationship to poor relief and welfare in contrast to its European counterparts in its early stages as a colony and then as it developed into a sovereign republic.

Attention then turns to investigate the roots of the Elberfeld System in 1853 within its origin city and immediate surrounding areas. It will focus on the history of the region, the influence that other poor relief ideas had upon the city, and finally the system’s creators, Daniel von der Heydt, David Peters, and Gustav Schlieper, and their motivations to create such an elaborate system. This section analyzes how the Elberfeld System functioned in its early application as it sought to live up to its founding motto of ‘*Hilfe von Mensch zu Mensch.*’ In addition, this chapter



will explore the ways in which the Elberfeld System spread throughout Germany in the latter half of the nineteenth century becoming the main source of amelioration in over fifty German cities by the outbreak of World War I. A section of this chapter analyzes the malleable nature of the system so that it could be structured to fit a city's particular needs, especially those areas with a larger population. The ability of the system to maintain its basic function while also being area specific is what is so deeply appealing to its British and American admirers

After establishing the Elberfeld System's application within Germany, the work transitions to explore how the decades of the 1860s and 1870s signaled a transformative moment for the three major industrial powers of the era and what forces encouraged reformers to look to the Elberfeld System as providing solutions to the problem of poverty. This chapter contends that the Panic of 1873 was not only the first global economic constriction but also the consequences it produced enabled the circulation of the Elberfeld System far beyond its original location. As a result of the economic depression reformers sought to grapple with unchecked outdoor relief which they believed encouraged a degeneration of the poor. Utilizing the framework of intercultural transfer, this chapter explores how the principles of the Elberfeld System found fertile ground in Great Britain and the United States.

The penultimate chapter explores the foundation of the Charity Organisation Society, a private philanthropic organization founded in London that looked to the Elberfeld System to solve problems created by the inadequacies of the British Poor Laws. It investigates the intellectual foundations that drew British reformers to German poor relief. Furthermore, it analyzes the Royal Commission that sent four British social reformers to investigate the Elberfeld System in various German cities and their suggestions for introducing the System in England. While the Elberfeld System was never intended to be copied in exact replication, it was specifically the role of poor

visitors that COS officials were drawn to emulate. Their individualized knowledge and attention given to each relief applicant was understood as the antidote for a haphazard and broken poor law system that exacerbated, rather than solved, the problem of poverty. As the COS grew in supporters it profusely published the activities undertaken to adopt Elberfeld principles to garner American social reformers' attentions.

The final chapter analyzes the role of the American Charity Organization Society, founded in 1877, and its relationship with the Elberfeld System. The American COS was similar to its British counterpart in that it too was concerned about the proliferation of unchecked outdoor relief and the rise of degeneration amongst America's working-class. By the 1870s, American reformers began to embrace a scientific approach to charity and were drawn to the Elberfeld System. The American COS sought to take the foundational principles of investigation into the needs of the poor and the use of friendly visitors as the basis for its operation. The American COS was not a monolithic structure. It continued to evolve throughout the Progressive Era as some of its branches took on more reform issues than just that of poor relief. The COS ultimately became one of a host of private organizations that sought to keep poor relief in the hands of private individuals and saw within the Elberfeld System a method of providing relief that seemed enlightened and compassionate at the same time.

Ultimately this analysis provides a transnational perspective into the larger narrative of German welfare history to create a fuller perspective on the transatlantic history of poverty. Through an analysis on the inception, structure, and application of the Elberfeld System, and a consideration of its importance in the larger transnational context of poor relief, this work demonstrates how localized schemes aided members of middle- and upper-class to come to terms with the unsettling nature of modernity and helped form specific ideas on how the problem of

poverty was understood and the nature of those who were in need of aid. This approach not only demonstrates the historical attitudes towards poverty and its management, but illuminates how these attitudes and perceptions towards poverty continue to find acceptance today.

Chapter One: ‘The Poor Are Always With Us’: An Overview of Poor Relief in Germany,  
Britain, and the United States before 1850

The Prussian King Frederick ‘the Great,’ ruling from 1740 until 1786, once stated that “It is the business of a Sovereign, great or small, to alleviate human misery.”<sup>9</sup> While Frederick the Great became a renowned sovereign who applied Enlightenment principles to his absolutist reign, his belief on the role of the sovereign, or state, embodies a unique yet age old problem for European states and that is the issue of poverty. The problem of poverty was one as old as Europe itself and during the Middle Ages the Christian religion laid the blueprint for the reality of the problem and for possible solutions. As Europe began to experience changes in its religious, political, economic, and philosophical makeup, however, the ways of dealing with poverty slowly altered.

The changes in poor relief in the Western world are closely linked to larger phenomena in the religious, economic, intellectual and political realms of various states. The first fundamental shift to poor relief since the Middle Ages came in the wake of the Protestant Reformation and the subsequent wars of religion that transpired across Europe. As many states tried to shed the power of the Catholic Church a key area ripe for reform was poor relief. The decisive change came first in England under the passage of the Elizabethan Poor Laws in 1601. While the Elizabethan Poor Laws established a standard followed in England for 250 years the second major shift came during the Age of Enlightenment. The Enlightenment brought new ideas about the nature of the individual and the role of the state. It placed the individual at the center on the issue of poverty and making poverty a direct reflection of one’s labor, ability, and self-control. The individual was responsible for their own condition and often times found themselves outside the ability to seek help within

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<sup>9</sup> William Harbutt Dawson, *Social Insurance in Germany, 1883-1911: Its History, Operation, Results*, (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1912), 2.

this new understanding. This idea was compounded when merged with the changing economic conditions of Europe through the Industrial Revolution. The Industrial Revolution fundamentally reshaped the ways Europeans labored and how they went about securing employment. With the impact of boom and bust cycles in the capitalist economic system to new laws allowing for freedom of movement to meet labor demands, poverty seemed, by the nineteenth century, more rampant than ever.

The highly mobile society produced by the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution initiated further demands for reform. By the late eighteenth-century, the Prussian state enacted a new law code requiring local communities to provide relief for its indigent population. By the 1830s the third transformation of poor relief developed in Europe during what contemporaries called the ‘Age of Pauperism.’ This multi-decade period was the result of continued economic and labor transformations from the Industrial Revolution and the inability of older poor laws to cope with the new demands. As the Age of Pauperism produced a flurry of writings by reformers and economists, it led to an overhaul of the Elizabethan Poor Laws in England. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 signaled this third shift in poor relief’s transformation as it was predicated on the principle of less-eligibility and the workhouse as a test of one’s true need for relief. The Germans, however, refrain from embracing this same practice. Their concern over the new nature of poverty called ‘pauperism’ ushered in the beginning of the Elberfeld System.

The United States has an interesting place within this larger European relationship to poor relief. As the United States began as a colony of Great Britain their early relationship with poverty was modeled after the older Elizabethan Laws. After gaining its independence many of these practices remained as a central part of American poor relief. However, poverty has always had a unique relationship with the United States. For much of the nation’s history its citizens asserted

that poverty was inherently un-American as the land's natural plenty made the condition unnecessary. In the early years of the republic, America's predominately agricultural society engendered Thomas Jefferson's ideal of yeoman farmers and encouraged the belief that the nation did not require the same level of poor relief overhaul that Europe experienced in the first half of the nineteenth century. Yet as the Industrial Revolution spread throughout the U.S., and the frontier was settled, the same problems of poverty plaguing Europe would find their way to America's shores. It would not be until the aftermath of the Civil War and the political, social, and economic transformations of the 1860s and 1870s that significant policies towards poor relief would change.

What these varied schemes of poor relief in Germany, Great Britain, and the United States indicate is that nineteenth century social reformers were tackling an age-old problem with many of the same understandings, solutions, and perceptions that were held by individuals since the early modern age. Additionally, the expansion of state or centralized control into matters of poor relief is not the nexus point for understanding welfare state development. Rather the transformation of poverty in the nineteenth century and the response it engendered from social reformers holds significant sway on the formation of modern welfare states. From the Middle Ages to today, there remained the consistent challenge of defining who were the deserving and non-deserving poor and what type of relief other members of society and the government should provide. By broadly surveying the diverse means of poor relief management in centuries before the formation of modern welfare states it illuminates the perception that poverty remained the unsolvable problem thus proving the Biblical maxim 'the poor are always with us.'

### **Poor Relief before the Reformation**

From the Middle Ages to the eighteenth-century caring for the poor remained a communal responsibility with relief dispersed by churches, local associations, or the well-to-do, often in

concert with one another. The assistance individuals received consisted of basic necessities such as food, clothes, or firewood. One of the oldest examples of associational relief was the hospital in Wemding in Southern Germany which operated “as an old-age and nursing home for indigent residents with funds donated back in 917 C.E.”<sup>10</sup> Many of the “fraternities, orders, guilds, corporations, and brotherhoods, which had...religious, ritual, economic, and political meaning” were the primary distributors of welfare.<sup>11</sup> Voluntary membership into these associations helped to provide a level of protection for its members that without it would make life’s uncertainties unmanageable. For times of sickness associations would provide for health care. In cases of death the funeral costs along with caring for a man’s widow and children were part of the protections associations provided. Michael Stolleis, in his study on the origins of the German welfare state, found that many of these associations “were largely still in existence in the nineteenth century and were incorporated into the process that gave rise to social insurance.”<sup>12</sup>

The intellectual foundation for early forms of poor relief came most notably from Thomas Aquinas (1224/24-1274), the well-known Christian theologian and philosopher. His ideas about caring for the poor utilized the Catholic principle of *caritas*, or the provision of welfare and charity to those in need. Aquinas posited that both Christian ethics and individual salvation was closely linked with *caritas*. It was not solely an outward action that people could follow but rather an inward attitude that encouraged an outward action. As Sebastian Schmidt asserts, “For Aquinas, it was this motivating attitude which decided how the charitable act of loving one’s neighbor was to be judged.”<sup>13</sup> Aquinas believed that all Christians who failed to aid their fellow neighbor in

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Stolleis, *Origins of the German Welfare State: Social Policy in Germany to 1945*, trans. Thomas Dunlap, (Berlin Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag, 2013), 24

<sup>11</sup> Stolleis, *Origins of the German Welfare State*, 7.

<sup>12</sup> Stolleis, *Origins of the German Welfare State*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> Sebastian Schmidt, “The Economy of Love: Welfare and Poor Relief in Catholic Territories of the Holy Roman Empire (1500 to 1800),” in *Poverty and Welfare in Modern German History*, ed. Lutz Raphael (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), 26.

difficult times were doing nothing short of sinning. It was not the responsibility of the alms giver to determine the veracity of the request for aid, just to meet the need. There was, according to Aquinas, a triangular relationship in the distribution of welfare: God, the alms giver, and the one in need. Each of these parts in the relationship held a particular function. The almsgiver was to give, and give freely. The alms receiver was to offer prayers to God on behalf of the giver. Finally, God acted as the omnipotent judge who weighed each action and credited to each a measure of righteousness.

Aquinas did not believe that alms giving was a form of social discipline or control but rather asserted a hierarchical nature in the interactions of the impoverished and givers of aid, undergirded by the divine order. “The giving of alms is portrayed as a conscious act delivered from a position of power, affirming and renewing society’s Christian value system and hierarchical order.”<sup>14</sup> Aquinas’ approach to poverty was not a problem to be fixed but an opportunity to show Christian acts of kindness for one’s neighbor. Therefore, it was not so much about social control but a natural product in the nature of society determined by God and embodying the Biblical dictum in the Gospel of Matthew and the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy that ‘the poor will always be with you’.<sup>15</sup>

The final element of Aquinas’s intellectual theories on welfare relates to the connection between *caritas* and individual salvation. Aquinas asserted that both the poor and the charitable giver were integral parts in the means of achieving eternal life. The condition of being poor, the responsibility of praying for the alms giver, and the act of giving charitably, based upon the

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<sup>14</sup> Schmidt, “The Economy of Love,” 26.

<sup>15</sup> There are several references to this adage in the Christian Bible. See Deuteronomy 15:7-11, Matthew 26:1-13, Mark 14:3-9, John 12:1-8.



Christian duty were “highly promising means of gaining eternal life.”<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, because the individual was at the center of poor relief, it precluded the need for states to step in a regulate relief. It was ultimately the responsibility of individual members of the Christian community. The power of Aquinas’s ideas on the relationship between the poor and salvation is unsurprising within the context of the Middle Ages. Religious rituals and observances dominated the lives of individuals from all classes. The Church was the heart of community life and people interpreted most phenomenon that occurred as having spiritual origins. This meant that Church teachings and commands on issues like poverty held immense power for a community.

By the late Middle Ages Aquinas’s beliefs continued to dominate perceptions towards poverty within Europe. One of the signature applications of Aquinas’s theories were the activities pursued by the Fuggers, a wealthy German merchant family. Led by the brothers Jakob (1459-1525) and Anton (1493-1560) Fugger, the family established a poor settlement in the southern German city of Augsburg in the sixteenth century. The brothers gained wealth and notoriety as merchants, often being equated with the De Medici family of Florence, and started out operating a trading, conveyance, and investment business. Augsburg’s location made the city and family uniquely situated to benefit from the growing commercial activity of the period. The city was also at the crossroads of travel through the Alps, making it a center of trade. Through their success as merchants the Fugger brothers entered the banking industry. Their banking endeavors were so fruitful they helped “financed the rise to power and the imperial crown of the Habsburgs, minted coins for the popes and paid their Swiss Guard,” and subsidized the election of Spain's King Charles V as Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in 1519.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Sebastian Schmidt, “The Economy of Love,” 27.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Kluger, *The Fugger Dynasty: The German Medici in and around Augsburg: history and places of interest*, trans. Christa Herzer, (Augsburg: Context Verlag, 2008), 13.

By the early decades of the sixteenth-century the Fugger brothers had launched their businesses and wealth to European-wide fame. From 1516 to 1523 Jakob Fugger channeled some of the family wealth into building a social settlement called the Fuggerei in Augsburg. The settlement comprised fifty-two houses of 106 apartments along with communal squares and a church. Inhabitants came and went through a gate making it a small community within the city of Augsburg. The construction of such a settlement was for the deserving-poor within the community, meaning those who had become poor through no fault perceived of their own. This meant that most inhabitants were the elderly, widows, disabled, and orphans. Rent was extremely low, equivalent to the worth of the widow's mite in the Synoptic Gospels, but residents were also expected to say three prayers (the Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary and the Apostles' Creed) a day for Jakob Fugger and the Fugger family.<sup>18</sup> These requirements of residents relate closely to the purpose and function of poor relief according to Aquinas. The Fugger family hoped to ensure their eternal salvation through establishing the community, if not also as a form of penance to counteract their activities of usury, a practice that still held significant stigma in the sixteenth century.

### **Early Modern Poor Relief after the Reformation**

The first major shift in the practice of poor relief came as a result of the tumultuous events created by the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. As the Catholic Church seemed to lose some of its hold in regions where Protestantism flourished the methods, means, and ideology undergirding relief transformed. Pushed aside were Aquinas's theories that connected charitable responsibility with individual salvation or the individual giver assessing and meeting the needs of the impoverished. What emerged in the aftermath of the Reformation was a poor relief system that heavily relied on the oversight of state (primarily local) governments. From the start of the

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<sup>18</sup> See Mark 12:41-44, Luke 21:1-4.

religious wars in the sixteenth century until the end of the Thirty Years War in 1648 the instability and destruction brought by these conflicts not only disrupted traditional modes of relief but increased the numbers of those in need. As the state took a more active role within the realm of poor relief they justified these actions in several ways. First, the state saw that their interaction with the poor was a way of maintaining order over society. The relationship between the state and welfare was grounded in Christian ideals but also incorporated the secular desire to control the lower and potentially unruly classes. The state would incorporate Christian terminology in its management of poverty, never abandoning the Christian duty and obligation people had for caring for the poor. Second, the Reformation and religious wars initiated a confiscation of church property and began a greater secularization of society. As historian Michael Stolleis posits, “With this, the responsibility for social problems also shifted. It was now the city authorities and the territorial ruler who were admonished by theory and urged by praxis to take the initiative against poverty, and to make sure that the burden of poverty was diminished and transformed into productive labor.”<sup>19</sup>

One of the best examples of the state taking a more active role in poor relief came in England under the rule of Queen Elizabeth I. Known popularly as the Elizabethan Poor Law, the 43<sup>rd</sup> Elizabeth, or the Old Poor Law, the new mandate was enacted in 1601 and formally established a poor law system in England and Wales. The Poor Relief Act of 1601 built upon the older traditions and synthesized earlier and less comprehensive laws that began in 1552. The immediate impetus for its passage was due to a crippling economic depression causing high levels of unemployment and exacerbated by a widespread famine. Still utilizing a basic Christian

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<sup>19</sup> Stolleis, *Origins of German Welfare State*, 10.

framework of responsibility, the Queen hoped the laws would maintain order and increase the common good of the Kingdom.

Just as in the pre-Reformation era, the parish or local level remained the center of relief, and by the mid-sixteenth century greater regulation became commonplace. In 1552 Parish records began to be kept on a more consistent basis so as to catalog those who were deemed poor, a phenomenon present across Western Europe. By 1563 categories emerged to designate the poor, enabling a greater supervision and control over them. The new categorization defined one group as those who desired to work but could not due to circumstances beyond their control and were classified as able-bodied or deserving poor. They would, in turn, be given temporary outdoor relief, meaning relief in kind, or provided with work so as to earn a wage. The second group were those considered disabled, another level of those considered deserving poor. Their condition was deemed deserving if their need for relief was predicated on age (too old or young) or illness. Rather than outdoor relief, this group was to be seen to in almshouses, hospitals, or orphanages. For those too young, either orphans or children of the poor, they were to learn a trade so as to ensure their self-reliance as they aged. The third group were designated as the idle poor, the most despised group of relief seekers. They were those who could work but willingly chose not to. The local state governments had no sympathy for those in this group and fully expected them to be publicly shamed, possibly even whipped, so as to learn and amend their habits. While these three groups had greater delineation by 1563, they were not wholly new nor were they confined to England. Much of Europe had similar designations and protocols for managing them by the sixteenth century.

By 1572 the first required tax was levied on the local community in England that stipulated they must alleviate poverty within their bounds. By 1597 local Justices of the Peace were granted

the authority to raise funds to pay for poor relief and established the role of ‘Overseer of the Poor.’ The Elizabethan Poor Law combined these various measures into one unified law that standardized relief. Specifically the law did four things. First, it set a tax on every parish in England to fund a poor relief reserve. Second, the establishment of the official office of local overseers of relief which increased to two individuals rather than one. These offices were unpaid and filled by unwilling participants, but usually came from the upper echelons of a community. The third element of the Elizabethan Poor law was to find work for those who were able to labor, never leaving them in their condition of want if it could be helped. Lastly, a duty was placed on property owners to give directly to the relief fund based upon their income. It was the responsibility of the Overseer to carry out the various elements of the law. They also had the autonomy of determining the necessary rate to meet the relief needs within a community, to collect the poor duty from the community’s property owners, give out food, money, or other resources directly to those in need, and administer the local alms-house.<sup>20</sup>

The 43<sup>rd</sup> Elizabeth remained largely unchanged for the next 250 years. It was so monumental that it became an adequate model for other states to embrace in the wake of instability of the Reformation. While it never did away with the Christian basis for relief, the Poor Law of 1601 did symbolize a growing trend of the secularization of society, meaning that what had once been the purview of Church responsibility now fell as a function of the state. This shift marks an important change in poor relief as states step into the vacuum created by the Reformation and the loss of consolidated Church power. As absolutist monarchs saw avenues to bring order out of chaos after the wars of religion it came through strengthening their own control over new areas. While

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<sup>20</sup> “Elizabethan Poor Law,” (1601).

this marked an unprecedented step in state authority, it also altered citizen's expectations of state responsibility.

### **Poor Relief in the Age of Enlightenment through the Early Nineteenth Century**

In the Age of Enlightenment, a new perspective on the individual took hold throughout Europe that asserted that individuals were sovereign beings. This autonomy transformed the responsibility placed on individuals in that they, despite class and gender, were accountable for their conduct to both fellow humans and to God. Along with increased responsibility, the individual became "master of his own fate in both this life and the next...should he fail to walk the straight and narrow path, he must bear the consequences, and should he fail, all he can hope for is mercy."<sup>21</sup>

These ideas about the sovereign individual had a tremendous impact on the perceptions toward poverty in two primary ways. First, the idea of work transformed into a reflection of one's self-worth. Working hard meant that an individual was staying on the straight and narrow and was fulfilling Christian ideals of hard work. This idea held the premise that work would ensure protection from poverty. Second, the idea of the autonomous individual allowed the indigent to be understood as having become poor as a direct consequence of unscrupulous life choices. Since the individual was now in control of his own fate and his actions were to determine this fate, he was expected to take charge of his conduct. Yet, this idea left little room for poverty being a consequence of circumstances out of the individual's control. This idea remains an enduring notion well into the twenty-first-century. As a result of rapid industrialization and the adoption of laissez-faire economic practices, many of those impoverished were thrust into misery not by choices but by factors out of their control, such as fluctuations in free markets, increases in population, and

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<sup>21</sup> Stolleis, *Origins of the German Welfare State*, 10.

factory accidents. Due to the pervasiveness of the autonomous individual's life choices being central to their relationship to poverty, the majority of modern poor relief practices reflect this idea.

The state's more assertive role within the realm of poor relief was also furthered by the economic and political practice of cameralism, the German variant of mercantilism. Cameralists sought to aggrandize the state's potential for revenue and authority. Along with this, there was also an essential aspect of cameralism that was concerned with the common good of the people. This concept emphasized substantial government intervention and asserted, according to early sociologist Albion W. Small, that "the object of all social theory was to show how the welfare of the state might be secured. They saw in the welfare of the state the source of all other welfare. Their key to the welfare of the state was revenue to supply the needs of the state. The whole social theory radiated from the central task of furnishing the state with ready means."<sup>22</sup> The implementation of cameralist philosophy in relation to poor relief came through significant regulation of the poor. These regulations, known as *Polizeiordnungen*, were enacted within Germany and dealt with coordinating "poverty, alms-giving, and the expulsion and punishment of foreign beggars."<sup>23</sup> While much of the cameralist ideology desired to increase the wealth and productivity of the economy, its focus on the welfare of society and promoting the common good demonstrates a transformative idea that "the state existed for higher goals than its own enrichment."<sup>24</sup> While the concept that the state existed to ensure the welfare of society did not bring about massive changes, it was radical enough to instill the idea of the state's responsibility to its citizens at an early stage.

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<sup>22</sup> Albion W. Small, *The Cameralists: The Pioneers of German Social Policy*, (1909; repr., Ontario: Batoche Books, 2001), 4.

<sup>23</sup> Stolleis, *Origins of the German Welfare State*, 11.

<sup>24</sup> George Steinmetz, *Regulating the Social*, 63.

The first time the state officially took responsibility in caring for the poor within the German states was in 1794 through the General Law Code for the Prussian States (*Allgemeine Landrecht*). Enacted by Frederick II, the General Law Code established a basic standard and equality before the law for Prussian citizens. The Code indicated “The laws of the state apply to all members of the state, without regard to class, rank, or gender.”<sup>25</sup> The civil code covered a variety of laws, including civil, penal, family, public, and administrative laws. Included within these were laws for the management of the poor, clarifying whose responsibility it was to provide care. The code ensured that local states provided necessities such as food and other living resources to the indigent. It was expected that the Prussian Code’s provision to the poor operated in tandem with existing charitable institutions, such as almshouses and the Church, within various communities. The enforcement of the code system, in its entirety, occurred as long as it did not conflict with local customs. For poor relief, this requirement ensured that someone with the means was to take responsibility for those who were in need.

While the Prussian civil code assumed the responsibility for the poor, it also encompassed stipulations of how and who received goods from those distributing resources. For example, the Code distinguished between deserving and non-deserving poor. While the state took responsibility in meeting basic needs, responsibility also fell onto families. If an extended family or the children of the elderly were able to provide resources, the state would look to them to do so before they interfered. This shared responsibility allowed the state more freedom to help those without family aid. Un-deserving poor were described as “those who are [poor] only out of laziness, love of idleness, or other disordered inclinations.”<sup>26</sup> The Code called for these individuals to be stopped

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<sup>25</sup> *Allgemeines Landrecht für die Preußischen Staaten von 1794. Textausgabe*, trans. Ben Marschke, ed. Hans Hattenhauer, (Frankfurt/Berlin: Metzner, 1970), 51-54.

<sup>26</sup> *Allgemeines Landrecht für die Preußischen Staaten von 1794*.



by use of force or punishment and be put to work with proper supervision. The state took interest in finding work for those citizens who were able. Those able-bodied individuals, who chose not to work often begged on the streets, which the code prohibited. Providing employment for these individuals would ensure that the impoverished did not litter community streets. Foreign-born individuals who fell into poverty were equated with those as un-deserving poor. Often stigmatized as those who begged, the Code called for their removal from the state and return to their country of origin. The Prussian Code also required that each local state contribute to the poor relief fund through taxes. This ensured that the fund would remain solvent, meet the needs of the poor, and maintain good order with the community. Churches and charitable institutions also provided their funds for assistance within the community. The close association between local church and state eliminated the overlapping distribution of goods within a community. The relationship also guaranteed support for the needy and reduced abuse of the system.

The Prussian General Code remained in effect until the end of the nineteenth century, even after German unification in 1871, and extended to encompass all of the new nation-state. However, for the poor laws, exceptions were made for other forms of poor relief, such as the Elberfeld System. Many areas of Germany practiced this system of poverty management and the Prussian Code did not prohibit these states from doing so. Instead, the code remained as a rudimentary set of laws, claiming obligation for meeting the needs of the poor. While several changes, extensions, and specifications were made during the nineteenth century, the Prussian General code remained the core regulation for poverty management for over one hundred years.

By the nineteenth century, the altering within the structure of society reached an accelerated pace thanks to the effects of the Industrial and French Revolution. These events, and the ideas that flourished with them, reshaped the economic, political, and social makeup of Europe.

Economically and politically, countries developed into capitalist economies that enabled a transitioning of early modern monarchical powers into modern democratic states. Socially, Revolutionary ideas encouraged reason, individualism, and basic rights bestowed upon humanity. As the transformation occurred, however, there developed a desire to restrict who could take part and lead the new society. As the French Revolution advocated for civil rights, individualism, and reason, these rights and those capable of reason needed to be limited certain groups within society. The new social order created class awareness and as capitalist markets assumed primacy, class consciousness became the distinguishing feature between individuals.

Concerns over the lower-classes presented an ever-present problem to nineteenth century thinkers however most of them understood the Social Question as a product of modernity. Modernity, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was extremely unsettling for the average individual. The world was changing at such a rapid pace that its byproduct, uncertainty, hit at the crux of individual lives. It was not uncommon for individuals to seek answers and stability to the changing world. The ideas that established the new socio-political order of the nineteenth century linked itself with the positive notion of open-ended progress. Yet the positive nature of progress did not translate into happiness and certainty for the average individual in the nineteenth century. Instead, progress and modernity was extremely jarring and often caused people to question this open-ended progress. Also, the Social Question was the product of industrial development, massive population growth, occupational freedom, and the ineffectiveness of European governments to handle these changes. The answer was to find a way to manage all those individuals who were impacted by its effects. Concerns over mass riots, unrest in industrial cities, the ideologies of socialism and Marxism, which greatly appealed to the lower-classes, and worries

over health and disease, encouraged nineteenth century leaders, politicians, and social reformers to valorize and normalize the inherent traits of the upper- and middle-classes.

For Germany the alterations came through the impact of the Napoleonic Wars, which enabled Germany's geography to take a more solidified shape by recognizing where its boundaries existed. The outcome of the Napoleonic Wars transformed Germany from several hundred small distinct states into several dozen. There also developed a growing sense of German nationalism and German identity. In 1815, the establishment of the German Confederation answered the newly recognized German identity question and inaugurated a new beginning for Germany. As Abigail Green states, "The onus on many German governments was to reinvent the state for this new context, reforming its institutions, refining its relations with its neighbors, and redefining the identity of its inhabitants."<sup>27</sup>

As the new Confederation established its power, Germany also witnessed the expansion of a free market economy. Establishing the *Zollverein*, or customs union, within the Confederation helped to ensure capitalist success. The new economic system produced a law guaranteeing the freedom of occupation (*Gewerbefreiheit*) allowing individuals to practice whatever trade or craft they desired and removed the regulations placed on them by the older guild system. Freedom of occupation changed the guild's dominance and it entered a time of crisis. Before the enactment of this policy, artisans found their place in society amongst the petty bourgeoisie and held a solid sense of security. The freedom of occupation policy and the developing free market plunged many of these artisans into wage dependency in addition to increasing the number of workers in various trades.

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<sup>27</sup> Abigail Green, *Fatherlands: State-building and Nationhood in nineteenth-century Germany*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 5.

A policy that went hand in hand with the freedom of occupation was freedom of movement. This law enabled those who were now capable of entering any trade to live or move wherever they desired. Previously, feudal and absolutist ideology confined individuals to living in the same area where they were born. People were tied to their land of origin and had little or almost no opportunity to move. The poor relief system maintained under the Prussian General Code favored the restricted mobility of individuals. Since local communities and families were responsible for caring for the poor, the state did not have to worry about caring for those who were not part of their community or about finding their family. The lack of mobility ensured that a local poor board would be able to distinguish its poor from the foreign vagrants. After the enactment of the freedom of movement policy, flaws in the poor management system became apparent. As Hermann Beck asserts, “Such a system of poor relief could function only in a socially and geographically immobile society, where subjects remained tied to the soil, where fertility was checked by marriage consents granted by manorial lords, and where town burghers rarely felt tempted to venture beyond familiar walls.”<sup>28</sup> Taking into account the effects of the new free market, freedom of occupation, freedom of movement, along with the elimination of marriage restrictions, the issue of poverty became one of vast proportions reaching the developing working-class.

By the late 1840s, the State Encyclopedia (*Staats-Lexikon*) characterized the freedom of occupation policy as being the “best suited to reestablishing the natural relationship of supply to demand destroyed by compulsory guilds. Competition expands where the opportunity for sales increases, or because products are perfected and prices become cheaper, and it can be extended even further through increased work and skill; it is more easily reduced where the tradesman is not confined to his craft but can easily shift to other kinds of business the moment his own no longer

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<sup>28</sup> Hermann Beck, *The Origins of the Authoritarian Welfare State*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), 150.

supports him.”<sup>29</sup> This viewpoint clearly supports the freedom of occupation policy, recognizing that with a free market economy and the factors of supply and demand, the policy works best for all industrial workers to make their own wealth and secure their own future. However, Leipzig economist Friedrich Bülow (1805-1859) commented that the greater amount of freedom placed on society caused a greater amount of need. He stated, “The needs of all have increased, and what is now a need for the poorest was once not even so for the richest.”<sup>30</sup> While the needs of society increased, Bülow still accepted that market-oriented solutions were the answer to meet these needs and to combat the issue of poverty.

The relationship between guilds, artisans, workers, and the free market economy became a battleground in determining which system was more advantageous. Industrialization tended to exacerbate the issue of guilds and the independent worker. Opponents of the guild system were those former artisans and journeymen who lost their security with the freedom of occupation policy. However, opponents also included those who understood freedom of occupation as a policy that promoted the growth and potential unpredictability of the proletariat. German social reformer Victor Böhmert (1829-1918) stated, “The specter of the “proletariat” is cast in the leading role. It hovers like a dark shadow over what is for most people the rather dim idea of the condition of occupational freedom. The rest of the cast is constituted by: giveaway prices, starvation wages, the decline of the middle-class, the exploitation of the poor by the rich, the domination of capital,

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<sup>29</sup> “Freedom of Occupation”: Excerpt from the *Staats-Lexikon*: “Trade and Manufacturing” (1845-1848), a document by Carl von Rotteck and Carl Welcker. In *From Vormärz to Prussian Dominance, 1815-1866*, edited by Jonathan Sperber, volume 3, *German History in Documents and Images*, German Historical Institute, Washington, DC ([www.germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org](http://www.germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org)).

<sup>30</sup> “Friedrich Bülow’s Call for a Market-Oriented Solution to the Problem of Poverty in Germany during the First Half of the Nineteenth Century (1834)”, a document by Friedrich Bülow. In *From Vormärz to Prussian Dominance, 1815-1866*, edited by Jonathan Sperber, volume 3, *German History in Documents and Images*, German Historical Institute, Washington, DC ([www.germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org](http://www.germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org)).

murderous competition, unsound, fraudulent labor, and demoralization.”<sup>31</sup> Böhmert's make clear that while the freedom of occupation and freedom of movement policies were necessary for the emerging industrial society, apprehension arose from its impact. Concerns about wages, the stability of the middle-class, and the demoralization of society encouraged opponents of the policies

### **The Age of Pauperism**

One of the earliest indicators of a larger transnational problem of poverty emerging in the early nineteenth century was the language used by middle- and upper-class individuals to describe the nature of poverty they witnessed. Through their vocabulary it is evident that they began to believe a change occurred on the causes and qualities of this new type of poverty. From Germany to England the primary word to describe the new phenomenon was pauperism. While the word was not wholly new it took on new meaning. Originally the term pauper referred to someone who was in need of charity. By the 1750s there began a change that connected pauper to mean those who had fallen under the care of the state. Meaning they were unable to support themselves. However, by the nineteenth century, pauper and pauperism “became more and more abstract and more pejorative” and had “slipped into public discourse in sentences reeking of condemnation and moral superiority.”<sup>32</sup> As Lynn Hollen Lees states in her work, “clouds of ‘pauperism’ obscured the faces of the destitute.”<sup>33</sup> Within the pejorative context of this term was also the close association with modernity. People began to associate the need for expanded relief as a marker of modernity.

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<sup>31</sup> “Victor Böhmert's Critique of the Traditional and Restrictive Nature of Guilds (1858)”, a document by Victor Böhmert. In *From Vormärz to Prussian Dominance, 1815-1866*, edited by Jonathan Sperber, volume 3, *German History in Documents and Images*, German Historical Institute, Washington, DC ([www.germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org](http://www.germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org)).

<sup>32</sup> Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 40.

<sup>33</sup> Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers*, 41.

Gertrude Himmelfarb argues “pauperism was a product of the moral as well as the material advance of civilization- the increased capacity to provide material goods and an increased compassion for those who could not provide those goods for themselves.”<sup>34</sup> Therefore as the nature of poverty seemed to be changing as reflected in the vocabulary used to describe them, so too was it necessary to change the way of doling out relief. As the term pauperism came to widen the conception of poverty within a society it was the expectation that an advanced and civilized nation could adequately solve the problem. If the problem was a product of modernity, then modern advances could also fix it.

In the German context pauperism came to describe an entire two decade expanse reflecting larger changes within the economy, society, and poor relief. Attitudes towards poverty radically transformed with the rise of the Social Question and the intensified political tensions within Germany leading up to 1848. The Social Question inquired how Germany should respond to growing social concerns, namely, how could nations deal with massive population growth and in turn, the poverty produced from the transitional crisis. Social reformers, intellectuals, church leaders, members of the bourgeoisie, and political actors all sought answers to figuring out what should be done with the large number of lower and potentially unruly classes. Friedrich Bülow advocated for free markets and the removal of government regulation, which would in turn remedy poverty, stagnation, and the lack of productivity. Bülow’s account details the perspective that the rich had on overpopulation and the inability of the poor to provide for basic needs.

In our time, a sudden anxiety has spread among the rich, and they would like to safeguard themselves at any price against the danger they fear from the growing misery of the poor. If they were to take the most natural measures and make it easier for the poor to lift themselves up through their own efforts to a higher level of physical and spiritual welfare, this would help both them and the whole of society. But they are merely trying to look after themselves at the cost of the poor, and they

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<sup>34</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 148.

believe that they have removed the danger when they have used new restrictions to entrench themselves against the working classes, consequently intensifying the cause of the danger.<sup>35</sup>

The restrictions he references were specifically to prohibit marriage amongst those without means. The upper-classes hoped this idea would stifle overpopulation. Bülow responds adamantly against this idea stating that it affronts “human dignity most insolently.”<sup>36</sup> The development of the Social Question demonstrates the continued evolution on the issue of poverty in the nineteenth century and the movement of social issues to the forefront of the nineteenth century German mind. However, as Bülow’s account demonstrates, this awareness was not always from a place of consternation for the impoverished, but rather to protect the existing social order.

Before the industrial boom of the 1860s, the newly established market-oriented system within Germany remained fragile in its formative stage, only slowly transitioning from an agrarian dominated system to an industrial one. As John Breuilly has stated, “The growth in the labor supply was not matched by a corresponding demand for manufactured products.”<sup>37</sup> While underproduction was not chronic, it was coupled with an overproduction of agricultural goods in the 1830s. This resulted in a domino effect that created a depression of agricultural prices, the fall of agrarian incomes, corresponding to a decline in the demand for manufactured goods. By the 1840s, the agricultural overproduction ended and due to a series of failed crop cycles, caused what became known as ‘the hungry forties,’ fostering tremendous social impact throughout Germany.

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<sup>35</sup> “Friedrich Bülow’s Call for a Market-Oriented Solution to the Problem of Poverty in Germany during the First Half of the Nineteenth Century (1834)”, a document by Friedrich Bülow. In *From Vormärz to Prussian Dominance, 1815-1866*, edited by Jonathan Sperber, volume 3, *German History in Documents and Images*, German Historical Institute, Washington, DC ([www.germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org](http://www.germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org)).

<sup>36</sup> “Friedrich Bülow’s Call for a Market-Oriented Solution to the Problem of Poverty.”

<sup>37</sup> John Breuilly, *Nineteenth Century Germany: Politics, Culture, and Society, 1780-1918*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), 58.



Characterized as ‘the age of pauperism,’ German citizens during the 1830s and 1840s witnessed substantial population growth and the economy unable to respond in support, transforming poverty into a mass phenomenon. Poverty became a permanent fixture for many families, and it encompassed entire social groups, even those who had previously been economically secure, such as artisans. The vocabulary used mirrored that which emerged in England to mark the phenomena as it became so widespread. In 1846, the Brockhaus German lexicon and encyclopedia defined *pauperismus* as:

a condition where a numerous class of people can secure through the most strenuous work at most the most minimal subsidies (and cannot even be certain of this), a class whose members are- even before they are born- doomed for their entire lives to such a condition, a class that has no prospects of improvement and that, in fact, sinks deeper and deeper into lethargy and brutality, temptation, drink, and animalistic vices of all kinds, that supplies a constantly increasing number of recruits to the poorhouse, workhouse, and jails, and that yet still manages to replenish itself and increase its numbers with great rapidity.<sup>38</sup>

While pauperism characterized those experiencing unemployment, this definition shows that even working would not guarantee security from poverty. The depression of wages prohibited workers from providing life’s necessities for themselves and their families. The term indicates that even strenuous work, implying long hours or multiple jobs, would not ensure protection from poverty. Pauperism’s reach extended to the womb, indicating that groups of people were plunged into poverty before they were born with little possibility of improvement. This factor, along with engulfing whole classes of society, was unlike anything ever known in Germany, or in Europe. Many of the flaws within existing poor relief schemes were identified primarily due to the enormous scope of the problem.

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<sup>38</sup> “Pauperismus,” *Brockhaus’ Conversations-Lexikon der Gegenwart*, (Leipzig, 1840), IV:65.

According to concerned observers, pauperism led to moral decay, instigated the flourishing of idleness, drunkenness, and other ‘animalistic’ vices. In an account on the effects of pauperism in Leipzig, one writer stated “society and private property is threatened by the growing encroachments of poverty,” and that society would “soon recognize that much crime is only the consequence of too great of poverty and that many become criminals only after he lacked the funds to satisfy the hunger of his family.”<sup>39</sup> As a result of these consequences, a developing threat to the social order began consuming the minds of society’s leaders. The mass group of paupers held a formidable amount of unruly presence, which given their unstable place in society, could become volatile at a moment’s notice. While the term *pauperismus* defined the characteristics of those in poverty, they were also termed *die Eigentumlosen*, people without possessions.<sup>40</sup> This characteristic feature also indicated their potential for disrupting the social order. Being a people without possessions, the poverty-stricken had nothing to lose by rising up and demanding better conditions or leading the nation into a revolution. To stave off disaster the other groups in society responded by constructing ways to manage the developing Social Question.

The German experience with pauperism would in turn produce a flurry of literature and ideas on how to deal with the perceived crisis. These ideas would help lay the ideological foundation for a more expansive form of poor relief on the state level that would usher the start of the Elberfeld System. However, the British responded to the crisis of pauperism in a different way producing a radical altering of poor relief practices within the state. Similarly to German concerns, English reformers began to articulate the problems of older poor relief practices as encouraging idleness and dissolved the relationship between those in need from the giver. Reformers began to

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<sup>39</sup> Ein Man aus dem Volk, *Die Armuth und die Mittel ihr entgegen zu wirken*, (Leipzig: Wigand, 1844).

<sup>40</sup> See C. Jantke and D. Hilger, *Die Eigentumlosen Der deutsche Pauperismus und die Emanzipationskrise in Darstellungen und Deutungen der zeitgenössischen Literatur*, (Munich: Karl Alber Verlag, 1965).

discuss how the existing poor laws had made the wealthy in society antagonistic against the poor because the money given out to those in need came from a tax placed on the middle- and upper-classes. Furthermore critics argued that the older laws turned the poor into believing that their relief was a right and were becoming dissatisfied that it did not give them more. Some even argued that it encouraged the poor to have more children they could not properly care for so as to increase the relief they were allotted. What is notable about the English critique of pauperism is how similar it was to Germans perceptions signaling the transnational nature of the problem from the early decades of the nineteenth century. Additionally, this rhetoric is also unique in that despite being more than 180 years removed, these same critiques are used by detractors of the modern welfare state reinforcing how little has changed from this period to today. Finally, economic critics of the older poor laws argued that employers took advantage of the system by keeping wages low knowing that it would be buttressed by poor relief.

The reforming of the poor laws in England were not only linked with the larger transnational context of pauperism but also by some notable events at home. In the late 1820s and early 1830s England experienced a period of high unemployment and low wages due to the introduction of mechanization techniques in the farming industry. Threshing machines put many laborers out of a job causing them to be unable to buy food, clothes, and other goods. Then a series of poor harvests hit in 1829-30 which exacerbated these conditions and created the context for unrest. These conditions resulted in a series of uprisings known as the Swing Riots where laborers in rural areas of southern and eastern England began threatening and attacking farmers who were using the new thrashing machines and demanded that wages stop being lowered. This variant of Luddism created a harsh reaction by the British government. In the aftermath of the riots nineteen

people were executed, more than 500 were transported to Australia, and close to 650 were imprisoned for their participation.<sup>41</sup>

In the wake of the Swing Riots was also a growing dissatisfaction with the British electoral system. For many years people had been arguing that the existing electoral system denied important members of society the right to vote, especially middle-class industrialists and businessmen who had helped England emerge as the great industrial power of the time. Additionally, England's electoral system had not kept pace with the changing urban landscape and large industrial centers like Manchester, which had no MPs to represent them in parliament. After two failed attempts at passing a reform bill in 1831 through the House of Lords another series of riots broke out throughout England which resulted in a dozen deaths, the arrest and trial of over 100 people, thirty-one of whom were sentenced to death.<sup>42</sup> What also made these riots of even more pressing concern was the larger revolutionary fervor brewing in Europe. In July 1830 France experienced its own revolution that overthrew the Bourbon King, Charles X and replaced him with the Liberal supported Louis-Philippe who took the title 'King of the French' indicating that he understood his power came from the people. Once in power Louis-Philippe agreed to constitutional monarchy and many in England, particularly the Tories, interpreted these events as a sign that if reform was not actively pursued, revolution might find its way across the English Channel. With some continued political machinations the Reform Act finally passed in 1832. It expanded suffrage to an extent that on average one in every five men could vote, done so by lowering tax qualifications, and adjusted representation so that new urban-industrial areas had representation.

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<sup>41</sup> "Captain Swing," The National Archives: Power, Politics, and Protest: The Growth of Political Rights in Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, accessed January 26, 2018 <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/politics/g5/>.

<sup>42</sup> "The Great Reform Act," The National Archives: Power, Politics, and Protest: The Growth of Political Rights in Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, accessed January 26, 2018, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/politics/g6/>.

Overall, when looking at the context of the Swing Riots and the Reform Riots “the combination of rural unrest and political agitation made these two years one of the more volatile period of modern English history” and lay an important political and social groundwork for the coming of the new poor law in 1834.<sup>43</sup>

The reforming of the British poor laws in 1834 was a consequence of the larger economic and political events of the day. With the onslaught of pauperism and aided by the years of criticism for the old poor laws, the effort to reform began in 1832 when a Royal Commission was set up to investigate. While it seems that from the onset the Commission was established to investigate the problems of the old poor laws and reform them as needed the reality was that there already existed opinions within the Whig government of how the laws should be changed. Therefore, the Commission’s real function was to investigate and find evidence that supported the plan already crafted and anticipated by the Whig government. This meant that most of the Commission’s findings were heavily biased and historically inaccurate when trying to understand the nature of poverty at the time and the true short-comings of the Old Poor Laws. Yet at the same time, the Report provides a fascinating picture of how reformers “formulated and disseminated ideas about poverty which were influential far beyond the scope of the law” for the remainder of the nineteenth century. “In a sense, its very faults enhance its value: in pointing up the discrepancy between the reality as a good many contemporaries perceived it, the report demonstrates the character and power of the ideas that mediated between these two versions of reality.”<sup>44</sup>

The Commission called for twenty-six men to travel around England and Wales to gather evidence on the management of poor relief. Between them they visited 3,000 parishes in which

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<sup>43</sup> Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty*, 153.

<sup>44</sup> Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty*, 155.

they spoke with magistrates, clergymen, and overseers of the poor. “Despite the geographic breadth of their efforts, their inquiry was sociologically limited and intellectually quite narrow.”<sup>45</sup> The questions asked of these parishes were relegated to inquiries of local labor markets and seemed to focus more on rural regions rather than towns who at best got a superficial analysis. The questions were primarily target at distinguishing between those characterized as paupers versus those suffering from poverty. As Lynn Hollen Lees asserts, the Commission’s “analytical framework” understood poverty as resulting “primarily from unemployment, the maldistribution of labor, and the misuse of wages, whereas pauperism- the real problem-arose from individual immorality and fecklessness encouraged by public policy.”<sup>46</sup> What became the significant takeaway of the Report was what to do with the able-bodied pauper. To cure society from the danger of those idle persons who claimed they had a ‘right’ to relief despite not working there needed to be new mechanisms that kept the able-bodied pauper from receiving help.

The leading members of the Commission, and the two charged with drafting the Report, were Nassau Senior (1790-1864), an economist, and Edwin Chadwick (1800-1890), a social reformer and the former secretary to Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) the notable philosopher and social reformer. The most important element of the Report was the proposal made by members of the Commission to amend the existing poor laws rather than abolish them. According to some of the prevailing ideologies of the day, most notably the Malthusian argument that encouraged abolishment of poor laws all together, this position was not of little consequence. The decision to reform rather than abolish the poor laws was a “rational, principled decision” on the part of the Commissioners.<sup>47</sup> One of the major consequences of the Report was to better define who the poor

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<sup>45</sup> Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers*, 117.

<sup>46</sup> Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers*, 118.

<sup>47</sup> Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty*, 158.

were, especially within the context of pauperism. The central problem of the old poor laws was the lack of “distinction between the poor and the indigent” and the “mischievous ambiguity of the word *poor*” misled recipients of relief into believing they were “entitled to a share of the ‘poor funds’ when they were not.”<sup>48</sup> The Report defined the indigent as those who were poor from reasons outside their control, such as sickness, infirmity, old age, widows, and orphans. The Commissioners had no interest in restricting relief for those considered the ‘deserving poor’. The other group were those who the Commission understood as poor due not from their lack of ability to work but their intentional choice not to work, also known as the able-bodied pauper. This individual, or group of individuals, was the key issue. According to the Report the reformed poor laws needed to better regulate how it oversaw the relief given to the able-bodied pauper. Thus a well-regulated and intrusive state structure was the only means by which poverty could be managed. Furthermore, poverty was understood as a gateway to further degradation for society, so an interactive government helped avoid a “train of evils” encouraged by pauperism.<sup>49</sup>

The report utilized one primary standard to aid in “dispauperizing” the poor and that was the principle of less-eligibility.<sup>50</sup> This assumption based itself off of a comparison between the condition of the independent laborer and that of the pauper. When comparing the two there should exist a notable distinction that signals the status of the pauper as decidedly lower than that of the independent laborer. Any relief system that tried to set a standard level of subsistence encouraged the notion of a ‘right to relief’ by paupers. Meaning when their wages or labor did not meet the standard established by the relief system they immediately assumed that relief would come to fill

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<sup>48</sup> *Report from His Majesty’s Commissioners for Inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws*, (London, 1834), vi, 156, 29. Italics are from the original.

<sup>49</sup> Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty*, 163.

<sup>50</sup> *Report from His Majesty’s Commissioners for Inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws*, 128.

the gap. This assumption needed to be destroyed and any relief given out was undesirable and inferior to what could be garnered in labor. As stated in the Report, “It is only by keeping these things separated, and separated by as broad and as distinct a demarcation as possible, and by making relief in all cases less agreeable than wages, that anything deserving the name of improvement can be hoped for.”<sup>51</sup> Therefore help, by means of the poor law, should be highly disagreeable to any self-respecting worker.

It is from the principle of less-eligibility that comes the most notorious product of the new poor laws, the workhouse. While not new to the English, or larger European, landscape it had traditionally been the place for the indigent to go when they could not care for themselves. In this new context, however, the workhouse would be the place where the principle of less-eligibility was implemented. “In the workhouse the pauper, whether able-bodied or infirm, was literally, physically separated from the independent laborer. And by controlling conditions within the workhouse—food, shelter, work, discipline—the less-eligible status of the pauper could be enforced; indeed the very fact of confinement in a workhouse, the deprivation of liberty, was itself a primary condition of less-eligibility.”<sup>52</sup> The workhouse became a test to determine the able-bodied pauper from the independent laborer. The workhouse was understood to be a place of last resort, a place where very few would ever willingly choose to go, and thus would reduce the amount of aid spent by local communities and the state overall.

With the connotation of undesirability the workhouse also solved an additional problem of the old poor laws, the knowledge of the condition and situation of the poor themselves. The

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<sup>51</sup> *Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws*, 123.

<sup>52</sup> Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty*, 164.



workhouse operated as a “self-acting test of the claim of the applicant.”<sup>53</sup> The status of the workhouse as the locale of relief enabled individuals to enter or seek out help at their own motivation rather than use the valuable time of magistrates or justices of the peace to determine their need. The Report stated, “If the claimant does not comply with the terms on which relief is given to the destitute, he gets nothing; and if he does comply, the compliance proves the truth of the claim, namely his destitution.”<sup>54</sup> The reformers of the poor laws believed that the individual act of seeking out help from the workhouse helped draw “the line between those who do, and those who do not need relief” and the line was “drawn perfectly.”<sup>55</sup>

The principle of less-eligibility, the creation of the new style of workhouse, and the delineation it helped to provide British society produced a poor relief system that would grow in notoriety throughout Europe and the Western world and also grow in ire to those who fell under its control. While the Germans will not embrace this same notion of the workhouse in the nineteenth century, they sought to solve the pauperism problem by another means. While the British came less involved and less responsible for directly providing relief, the Germans, through the Elberfeld System, became more so. It should not be confused that the new poor laws in England tried to ignore the problem of poverty. The reformers who led the campaign believed they were solving it by modern, efficient means. It will be within this context of less-eligibility and the workhouse that new ideas about solving the problem of poverty will find fertile ground within the Charity Organization movement and will look to Germany as having a new set of solutions to the age old problem.

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<sup>53</sup> *Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws*, 148.

<sup>54</sup> *Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws*, 148.

<sup>55</sup> *Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws*, 148.

## Management of Poverty in the United States

The United States has a tumultuous history in its relationship to social welfare. In the twentieth century, extensive and generous welfare systems came to represent the majority of western nations and yet the United States seemingly lagged behind in fully accepting this trend. For much of America's existence its experience with poor relief and the formation of a well-functioning welfare state embodies a problematic relationship between citizen and state. The formal act of caring and aiding the poor is as old as the thirteen colonies and the management of poor relief has changed with the variations in the life of American citizens. America's welfare system, according to Michael Katz, "is not a rational creation, a set of clear and consistent policies; it is a draft, crazy, ungainly structure constructed over long periods of time."<sup>56</sup> Therefore, its history reflects its makeup.

During colonial times, the public maintenance of poverty stemmed from the English precedent in the Elizabethan Poor Laws. Just as in the European context, the American application of the law represented "a major turning point in the history of welfare in that it recognized the state's responsibility for the indigent. It distinguished between the able-bodied and the impotent poor and declared that it was the community's duty to help individuals who could not help themselves."<sup>57</sup> Colonial settlers utilized this same practice believing it was the function of their government to do so. The colonial application of the Elizabethan precedent contained the same four principles of its European counterpart. First, colonial poor relief was a public responsibility, with overseers of the poor. Second, poor relief was a local responsibility with each town or county within a colony organizing its own form of aid distribution and responsible for the poor living

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<sup>56</sup> Michael B. Katz, "Poorhouses and the Origins of the Public Old Age Home," *Health and Society* 62 (Winter 1984): 110.

<sup>57</sup> Jill S. Quadagno, "Poor Laws to Pensions: The Evolution of Economic Support for the Aged in England and America," *Health and Society* 62 (Summer 1984): 418.

within their area. This part of the English precedent was vitally important to colonizers because of their monetary responsibility of their poor. Leaders of different towns or counties did not want to be accountable for poor who were not part of their community. Boston and other New England towns, for example, participated in a system that required individuals to live in a community for twelve months before they could petition for relief. These towns also used a “‘warning out’ system designed to expel poor people who unexpectedly arrived in town.”<sup>58</sup> If they appeared to become a financial burden on the community, a warning would be issued to them. If no changes were made, they would be removed from the town.

The third principle of the colonial model of relief placed a large amount of responsibility on the family of the poor. Since many individuals in need of relief were widows, disabled, or elderly, their families, if they were able, remained the first to care for them. No distribution of public aid was offered. Lastly, the English law was particularly concerned with the well-being of children. Children of paupers or orphans were typically sent to be an apprentice with an artisan within the community.<sup>59</sup> This had many benefits for both the child and the artisan. It provided a home, food, clothes, and the learning of a marketable skill for the child, and it gave the artisan free labor, minus the costs for food and board, for almost two decades. Aid overseers felt that this particular source of help would deter the offspring of paupers from following in their parents’ footsteps.<sup>60</sup> Giving them the opportunity for educational development through apprenticeships would ensure they would become productive citizens in the future.

Since the English Poor Law established the parameters of aid allocation, the requirements and means of distribution varied from town to town. However, in most communities, elderly, sick,

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<sup>58</sup> Nian-Sheng Huang, “Financing Poor Relief: In Colonial Boston,” *Massachusetts Historical Review* 8 (2006): 77.

<sup>59</sup> Katz, “Poorhouses and the Origins of the Public Old Age Home,” 113.

<sup>60</sup> Tim Lockley, “Rural Poor Relief in Colonial South Carolina,” *The Historical Journal* 48 (December 2005): 973.

or disabled individuals who were unable to sustain themselves were sent to an almshouse that provided basic needs of shelter, food, and clothing. Workhouses provided shelter, food, and opportunities for employment for the idle or able-bodied poor. As in Europe, colonists saw these individuals as undeserving of assistance since they were able to care for themselves therefore many aid distributors limited how long or how much help these individual would receive. This same issue remains present in today's management of poverty in America. "The core of most welfare reform in America...has been a war on able-bodied poor: an attempt to define, locate, and purge them from the rolls of relief."<sup>61</sup> For communities without an almshouse, there was one central location for all of the community's destitute. Not all individuals who sought relief needed placement in a poorhouse. Instead, assistance for these individuals came in the form of money, food, clothing, medical care, and funeral expenses. Most monetary aid "never approximated the wages that an employed laborer could earn," therefore it attempted to not create a system of dependency.<sup>62</sup> For example, Elizabeth Boshere, a resident of South Carolina in 1773, came before her community for relief aid. They provided her with medical care, along with cloth and thread "presumably so that she could earn a living as a seamstress", demonstrating that overseers of aid wanted to help individuals generate their own income.<sup>63</sup>

While there was public relief provided on the local community level, churches provided the "largest private source" of poor relief distribution in the U.S.<sup>64</sup> Their Christian mandate, along with the precedent from the Church of England, allowed them to provide other resources of aid to the needy. Deacons and vestrymen oversaw the management of church aid in different parishes. Each church was responsible for its own poor, similarly to that of public institutions. Public relief

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<sup>61</sup> Katz, "Poorhouses and the Origins of the Public Old Age Home," 115.

<sup>62</sup> Katz, "Poorhouses and the Origins of the Public Old Age Home," 115.

<sup>63</sup> Lockley, "Rural Poor Relief in Colonial South Carolina," 955.

<sup>64</sup> Huang, "Financing Poor Relief," 74.

was paid for through taxes, while churches funded their aid distribution through weekly offerings at church. After the collection was received, the necessities of running the church were paid and the remainder was given to support its charitable activities.<sup>65</sup> Thus, church relief was only successful if those who had money gave enough to support this cause. Since many felt that it was their Christian duty, this was not an issue. Churches provided similar aid to that of public institutions. These two systems were never in competition, but they worked together to achieve the ultimate goal of helping those in need.

The church did set requirements for those who petitioned for aid. “Recipients of assistance not only had to be members in good standing of a church, they also had to suffer unusual circumstances. Poverty alone did not make them eligible for support.”<sup>66</sup> Correspondingly to public institutions, able-bodied poor who chose not to work were denied any form of aid benefits. The Boston Episcopal Charitable Society is an example of such an institution. Churches in South Carolina would deny recipients any further relief if it were discovered that their situation changed or if they began to abuse the system. While many things have evolved in the distribution of aid to the poor, this one principle remains the same. However, Christians during colonial times had to “reconcile compassion with the need to deter people from relying on public and private relief.” This issue was and still is “at the core of relief for the poor.”<sup>67</sup> While compassion and Christian mandate were primary motivators for churches to provide aid, historian Tim Lockley presents an alternative view. He argues that churches in South Carolina provided large amounts of poor relief because of their “deep-seated concerns about the position of the white poor in a society that was dominated by African slavery.”<sup>68</sup> The elite white vestrymen of these churches were concerned that

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<sup>65</sup> Huang, “Financing Poor Relief,” 74.

<sup>66</sup> Huang, “Financing Poor Relief,” 75.

<sup>67</sup> Katz, “Poorhouses and the Origins of the Public Old Age Home,” 115.

<sup>68</sup> Lockley, “Rural Poor Relief in Colonial South Carolina,” 955.

poor whites would form class alliances with slaves. In providing them with aid, the white elite would secure the class division between them.<sup>69</sup>

Moving from the colonial standard through the early years of the republic the perception of poverty took on an increased anti-American nature. Many Americans believed that the nation's natural bounty provided a means by which to keep poverty at bay by turning them into settlers on the frontier turning them into Jefferson's ideal of self-sustaining yeoman farmers. As the United States experienced its own consequences from industrialization the nature of poverty began to take a similar trend as that of Europe. Concerns over this inclination would usher social reformers in America's more industrialized regions to find ways to manage this distinct type of poverty. While Germany and Great Britain developed state policy in response to the growth of pauperism, the U.S. would not follow suit. Rather it would take the American Civil War to encourage policy makers to wade into the realm of social policy. The experience of the Civil War was a defining moment in America's history, not only in how it ultimately preserved the Union, but also in the scale of destruction and disruption to communal life and the subsequent outcome of the emancipation of four million slaves. Scholars like Theda Skocpol have argued that the origins of American social policy began through the Civil War pensions given to former Union soldiers beginning in the 1870s.<sup>70</sup> The prevailing narrative of U.S. social policymaking argued that the American welfare system persistently lagged behind from its European counterparts. These narratives focus on what was lacking in the American system. However, focusing on the role of Civil War pensions allows for a fuller picture of American welfare policy. Going back to this development can help answer *why* the U.S. took on the compulsion to give expensive and generous

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<sup>69</sup> Lockley, "Rural Poor Relief in Colonial South Carolina," 972.

<sup>70</sup> Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 2.

benefits for many individuals under the banner of Civil War pensions and how the actions taken by American policymakers compared to European counterparts.

The United States' budding welfare state was a product of the unique political environment known as a "patronage democracy."<sup>71</sup> This system "was patterned by the predominance of competing party organizations and the professional politicians who ran them."<sup>72</sup> With the combination of extensive popular election participation and the need to maintain support from wide sectors of society, Republicans and Democrats alike had extensive social networks and doled out jobs and incomes through a fine-tuned process of patronage. These included jobs offered by urban political machines to business contracts and posts within the government. Yet, it was distinctively perceived by those who participated in the system as justly earned in the spoils system for party loyalty and dedication. It is this atmosphere of Gilded Age politics that paved the way for pension benefits. First enacted in 1862, the benefit's programs and participation grew dramatically by the 1870s and with the passage of the Arrears Act in 1879 pensions became the fuel for congressional and party patronage. While this created the setting for a greater expectation between citizen and state, reformers and policymakers in the 1880s saw these systems more inherently different, being less substantial, than other forms of social insurance being implemented in Germany. Many of these reformers hoped they could benefit from the patronage democracy and transition from soldier's pensions to workmen's insurance. Unfortunately, what caused a fundamental break in this hoped for trajectory, was the suspicion and feelings of corruption that an increasing number of middle- and upper-class Americans, even in the North, felt was intrinsic in patronage democracy and civil war pensions. Outlets like *The World's Work* magazine printed articles "portray[ing] the ever rising costs of Civil War pensions, detailed the machinations of

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<sup>71</sup> Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, 72.

<sup>72</sup> Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, 72.

legislators in making them ever more generous, and documented lurid cases of “fraud and abuse” by individual claimants.”<sup>73</sup> Examples such as this fostered an attitude of distrust amongst Americans and thus soured their taste for any more universal noncontributory public pensions.

From the Middle-Ages to the nineteenth century the problem of poverty remained an ever-present concern for states and citizens in Germany, Great Britain, and the United States. The nature of poverty reflected the various changes brought upon Western society from a problem that offered the opportunity to show Christian piety to an issue of anxiety and concern. Through the transformations of increased state control to the rise of liberal-capitalist states, poverty became the purview of authorities rather than just churches. By broadly surveying the varied ways Germany, Great Britain, and the United States have dealt with poverty and poor relief from the Middle Ages to the mid-nineteenth century it is evident that the solutions often failed to solve the problem. With continued change in the realms of politics, economics, and society any solution proved to be only temporarily effective. The problem of poverty continued to transform by the mid-nineteenth century prompting new demands upon reformers and states. Through a process of experiment and variety, states choose to learn from one another in how to manage poverty in an efficient way. It will be through this progression of change and shared ideas and experiences that will ultimately give rise to new disciplines, such as social work, as a means of using rational and scientific, yet believed to be compassionate, solutions to solving the problem of poverty once and for all.

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<sup>73</sup> Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, 274.



## Chapter Two: Hilfe von Mensch zu Mensch: The Elberfeld System in Creation and Application

Located in the mountainous area of the lower Rhineland in the Wupper Valley, the city of Elberfeld (known today as Wuppertal) is home to the most notable form of state-sponsored German poor relief in the nineteenth century. Originally part of the Duchy of Berg, it fell under French occupation during the revolutionary wars and Napoleon Bonaparte's reign until 1815. After the Congress of Vienna, Elberfeld was incorporated into the Kingdom and Prussia and would remain so through German unification in 1871. Home to a thriving textile industry, specializing in the dying of fabric, it was one of the earliest areas for industrialization in the German states. With industrialization came a significant increase in its population as individuals were drawn to the demand for a labor force. Over time, and similarly to the developments in English textile regions, Elberfeld expanded its industrial development into metallurgy and chemical industries.<sup>74</sup>

Elberfeld's history during the early years of industrialization in the eighteenth century and throughout the first half of the nineteenth century played an important role in the development of the poor relief system that bore the city's name. By the late eighteenth century, the Rhineland region experienced an economic boom where new demands on land and resources grew significantly. A construction boom in the 1780s brought enlarged roads, new bridges, additional church and school structures, and rows of new palatial homes occupied by local merchant-manufacturers showing off their acquired wealth.<sup>75</sup> There was also significant population growth as factory jobs drew workers to the city. Estimates, somewhat conservatively, place Elberfeld's

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<sup>74</sup> See attached image 2.1 Map of Elberfeld, 1887. [https://www.discusmedia.com/maps/wuppertal\\_city\\_maps/3469/](https://www.discusmedia.com/maps/wuppertal_city_maps/3469/)

<sup>75</sup> Herbert Kisch, *From Domestic Manufacture to Industrial Revolution: The Case of the Rhineland Textile Districts*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 137-138. See also Wilhelm Langewiesche, *Beschreibung und Geschichte dieser Doppelstadt des Wupperthals nebst besonderer Darstellung ihrer Industrie, einem Überblick der Bergischen Landgeschichte...*, (Barmen: W. Langewiesche, 1863), pg. 243-44. J.F. Knapp, *Geschichte, Statistik und Topographie der Städte Elberfeld und Barmen im Wupperthale. Mit Bezugnahme auf die Stadt Solingen und einige Städte des Kreises Lennep* (Iserlone and Barmen: Wilh. Langewiesche, 1835), pg. 187, 197-98. Sonderland, *Die Geschichte von Barmen un Wuppertale*, pg. 117-118, 120-121.

population around 10,000 by the 1790s and its neighbor city of Barmen claimed around 7,000 residents. It was evident that by the turn of the century, the Wupper valley was a place of significant urban character and a noticeably stratified class structure.<sup>76</sup> This was not lost on its long-term residents who noted the speed at which this change occurred emphasizing the change within a matter of decades by claiming that land formerly utilized as cow pastures was now being used for the process of bleaching.<sup>77</sup>

Table 2.1 Population in Elberfeld<sup>78</sup>

Year	Population
1819	22,000
1850	39,000
1852	50,364
1857	52,590
1870	71,000
1910	170,000

The consequences of economic and demographic growth expanded the social makeup of the region to include a prominent middle-class along with an increasingly diverse working class that included both skilled and unskilled laborers. As industrialization flourished, however, so too did economic issues relating to the structural conditions of a new type of poverty, which did not go unnoticed to the city's inhabitants, who initiated a discussion on its origins and possible

<sup>76</sup> Kisch, *From Domestic Manufacture to Industrial Revolution*, 138.

<sup>77</sup> Johann Schmidt, *Geographie und Geschichte des Herzogthums Berg : seiner Herrschaften, der Grafschaft Homburg, und der Herrschaft Gimborn-Neustadt, der Grafschaft Mark, der ehemaligen Stifter Essen und Werden, der Grafschaft Limburg und der Stadt Dortmund; des Ruhrdepartementes und des ehemaligen österreichischen Herzogthums Limburg, jetzt ein Theil der Durte- und Niedermaasdepartemente* (Aachen, 1804), 13; as quoted in Kisch, *From Domestic Manufacture to Industrial Revolution*, 138.

<sup>78</sup> Jürgen Reulecke, *Geschichte der Urbanisierung in Deutschland*, (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1985), Table 3.

solutions. As early as 1788 the regional weekly newspaper, *Bergische Magazin*, was one of the first to consider the new social problem as it sought to understand where this new type of ‘misery’ was originating. The publication’s contributors still emphasized the practices of waste and carelessness as the root causes of the poor’s condition.<sup>79</sup> As the discussion continued, however, there seemed to be a greater awareness that this new type of poverty was related to the unequal accumulation of wealth in the hands of the bourgeoisie and that if something was not done then the poor’s condition would continue to deteriorate.<sup>80</sup> Even those traveling through the region, such as Christian Friedrich Meyer, noted in 1794 the extensive industrial development of Elberfeld stating that the textile manufactures provided thousands of jobs and yet due to volatile economic conditions, and the instability caused by the French Revolution, many of the factories were not operating and the poor were without work.<sup>81</sup>

One of the most important experiences for the Rhineland writ large, and Elberfeld in particular, was its experience in relation to the French Revolution and its status as an occupied territory during the early years of the nineteenth century. Scholars have discussed at length the impact of Napoleon and the French Revolution on Germany. For some, like Thomas Nipperdey, it was the harbinger of all future political developments in Germany, who proclaimed in manifesto fashion that “In the beginning was Napoleon.”<sup>82</sup> For others, such as Hans Ulrich-Wehler, it was the lack of a revolution in Germany, like that of France, that doomed the nation to a path of

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<sup>79</sup> Bergisches Magazin, IX. Stück, 1. Nov. 1788, S. 68. Bergisches Magazin, X. Stück, 5. Nov 1788, S. 73. As cited in „Mythos und Wirklichkeit des Elberfelder Systems“; Barbara Lube, “Mythos und Wirklichkeit des Elberfelder Systems,” in Karl-Hermann Beeck (ed.) *Gründerzeit. Versuch einer Grenzbestimmung in Wuppertal*, (Cologne, 1984), 158-159.

<sup>80</sup> Bergisches Magazin, XXXVI. Stück, 9. May 1789, S. 283. As cited in Barbara Lube, „Mythos und Wirklichkeit des Elberfelder Systems,” 159.

<sup>81</sup> Christian Friedrich Meyer, *Ansichten einer Reise durch das Clevische und einen Theil des Holländischen über Crefeld, Düsseldorf und Elberfeld, mit einigen dabei angestellten Betrachtungen im Jahre 1794*, (Düsseldorf 1797), 72-73.

<sup>82</sup> Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1800-1866: Bürgerwelt und starker Staat*, (Munich, 1893).

universal inferior development.<sup>83</sup> Other scholars have waded somewhere in the middle attempting to assert a more nuanced interpretation in order to examine what exactly was produced as a result of the revolution's presence within the German states. Specifically, the Rhineland is an important area of study to engage in this debate given that it, unlike other Germanic regions, fell under direct French control. While the French presence brought to end the last remnants of the feudal relationships that still existed, destroyed the required payments of tithes, broke up monastic lands, and spread ideas of liberty and equality, it was not without significant resistance.<sup>84</sup> However, the Rhineland's relationship to its French occupiers and the larger motivations of the French Revolution were paramount for future political, economic, and social developments. Even Friedrich Engels, who was a native of Elberfeld and the son of one of the city's most prominent manufacturers, argued that "the Rhineland was ahead of the remaining German lands, revolutionized by the French because of its industry, and ahead of the other German industrial districts (Saxony and Silesia) because of its French revolution."<sup>85</sup>

In the early years of the French Revolution, the cities of Elberfeld and Barmen benefited greatly. New markets opened, expanded sales were aided by the halting of French industries thanks to *levée en masse*, and English manufactures, caught up in the larger conflict, were unable to see their fabrics sold in large portions of Western Europe. Employment skyrocketed, and wages increased as new entrepreneurs were drawn to the region. There was also an increased presence of the middle-classes into municipal government affairs thanks to the spread of revolutionary principles. For example, the Municipal Ordinance (*Städteordnung*) of 1808 enabled urban self-

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<sup>83</sup> Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte, Volume 1, 1700-1815*,

<sup>84</sup> T.C.W. Blanning, *The French Revolution in Germany: Occupation and Resistance in the Rhineland, 1792-1802*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

<sup>85</sup> Friedrich Engels, "Die deutsche Reichsverfassungs-Campagne" in *Neue Rheinische Zeitung-Politische-ökonomische Revue*, ed. Karl Marx (London: 1850); reedited by Karl Bittel (Berlin: Rütten and Loening, 1955), 42.

government and instituted some liberal reforms by allowing property-owning males the right to vote and have a say in town responsibilities. Industrially, it was during these early years that Elberfeld would break into the red dye industry, with which they would later become famously synonymous, and challenged the hold the Turkish dying industry had claimed a monopoly.<sup>86</sup> By the time of Napoleon's rule the economic situation continued to flourish. Textiles and materials ranging from cotton, wool, silk, and velvet were exported bringing in millions. Ribbons alone accounted for 9 million francs and were sent to America, France, and Italy.<sup>87</sup> Elberfeld and its twin city of Barmen could employ more than 30,000 people within the textile trades and the two cities had between them a population of about 38,000. Napoleon himself visited the region and noted the financial magnitude the industries produced calling it a mini-England. After placing his brother-in-law, Joachim Murat, as the Grand Duke of the Duchy of Berg in 1806, Murat described his small principality as having the same industrial production as that of England.<sup>88</sup>

The period of economic boom did not last, and French occupation exacted significant economic strains on the Rhineland. While they claimed to bring liberation from tyranny and grant popular sovereignty to its citizens this was largely an emotional or idealistic motivation. In reality, the National Convention had instructed French generals to destroy the Old Regime and establish popular sovereignty, but it was understood that this was to be done under French leadership not under the freedom of those in the Rhine to choose for themselves what type of government they would create. This 'misunderstanding' occurred because the French needed the Rhineland to help pay for support of the French army. As a massive amount of French debt accrued, the industrial Rhineland became an area ripe for financial exploitation.<sup>89</sup> This meant that such financial hardship

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<sup>86</sup> Kisch, *From Domestic Manufacture to Industrial Revolution*, 193.

<sup>87</sup> Kisch, *From Domestic Manufacture to Industrial Revolution*, 205.

<sup>88</sup> Kisch, *From Domestic Manufacture to Industrial Revolution*, 205.

<sup>89</sup> Blanning, *The French Revolution in Germany*, 63-67.

brought rising prices, lower wages, and economic uncertainty. Manufacturers were forced to close their factories over anxieties of being controlled by French forces, and the instability brought on by the war fostered high inflation. For example, Elberfeld businesses were required to provide loans, obligatory labor services to build fortifications, and accept depreciated assignats as payment.<sup>90</sup> As the Rhineland was incorporated into the French Continental System, the protectionist policies exacted on the area earlier were removed and Elberfeld and its surrounding areas were cut off from selling their goods to French markets or those outside the French Empire. According to Herbert Kisch, “some three hundred merchants, manufactures, clothiers, cotton spinners, and others moved to the other side of the Rhine” between 1809 and 1813 to escape harsh French policies.<sup>91</sup> However, most could not do this and were forced to stay and suffer through the difficult conditions by reducing work weeks to three or four-days and some closed their firms altogether. Poor relief resources dropped substantially between 1813 and 1815 while demands only increased.<sup>92</sup>

In the years before the French Revolution Elberfeld’s poor relief was managed by churches. The city had practitioners of the three main denominations, Reformed Calvinist, Catholic, and Lutheran, however it was predominately an area of Calvinist Protestantism, unique to the larger Rhineland region that was Catholic. By 1795, the three main denominations in the city were so overwhelmed by the demands for relief that they were forced to abandon their roles in providing aid. Then, in 1800 when Elberfeld fell under French occupation its residents experienced, for the

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<sup>90</sup> Otto Schell, *Geschichte der Stadt Elberfeld* (Elberfeld: Baedersche Buchund Kunsthandlung und Buchdruckerei, 1900), 253.

<sup>91</sup> Kisch, *From Domestic Manufacture to Industrial Revolution*, 207.

<sup>92</sup> “Einnahmen und Ausgaben der Armenanstalt 1813-1815,” in Nachricht über die allgemeine Armenanstalt in Elberfeld. Die bisherigen Vorsteher derselben in ihre wohlthätigen Mitbürger am 16. März 1816, in *Historische Texte aus dem Wupperthale: Quellen zur Sozialgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts unter Mitarbeit von Marcus Puschnerat*. Eds. Karl-Hermann Beeck and Tânia Ünlüdağ, (Wuppertal: Born Verlag, 1989), 397.

first time and much to the dismay of religious leaders who believed it was their responsibility, poor relief under the authority of civic hands. A product of the French Revolution's ambition to restrain the Church's role and authority within society, the shift towards communal and not religious responsibility for poor relief established an important precedent for the region. Revolutionary influence encouraged the notion of poor relief as a civic responsibility of the city's elite and middling classes.<sup>93</sup> For example, the Municipal Ordinance of 1808 gave to local officials the responsibility of poor relief stating, "The entire care for the poor, then, will be entrusted to the hands of the citizenry, their sense of community, and the charity of the inhabitants of the city."<sup>94</sup> This formally introduced the relationship between civic responsibility and poor relief. It was an area for action, something citizens could vigorously shape with their ideas after having been dominated by religious authorities and ideas for centuries. Citizens now had the right, and obligation, to participate and craft a bourgeoisie-sphere of poor relief.<sup>95</sup> Interestingly, however, the restructuring of poor relief in Elberfeld was done during one of the periods of immense economic growth, where unemployment was virtually non-existent, and wages were high. Therefore, it is unsurprising that when the boom subsided and was replaced by economic hardship under the Continental System the restructured relief scheme did not survive. Yet the newly established relationship between citizen responsibility and poor relief did not weaken. The words "civic virtue" and "citizenship" were important signifiers expressing "a new sense of self" reflecting "a new willingness to take responsibility" for poor relief and over time this relationship was "defended" and "expanded."<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Lube, "Mythos und Wirklichkeit des Elberfelder Systems," 161.

<sup>94</sup> *Sammlung der für die Königlichen Preussischen Staaten erschienenen Gesetze und Verordnungen von 1806 bis zum 27sten Oktober 1810*, Berlin 1822. (Reprint. Bad Feilnbach, 1985.) pp. 324-27, 330-33, 342-50, *German History in Documents and Images*, German Historical Institute, Washington, DC ([www.germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org](http://www.germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org)).

<sup>95</sup> Lube, "Mythos und Wirklichkeit des Elberfelder Systems," 160.

<sup>96</sup> Lube, "Mythos und Wirklichkeit des Elberfelder Systems," 161.

Over the next half century, Elberfeld would vacillate between church and public relief efforts for the poor. After the Congress of Vienna, the Church resumed its responsibility to manage poor relief but due to industrialization and continued population growth it was forced to receive help from civic authorities in 1817. The Church, however, did not give civic authorities total control because they maintained a desire within the city to keep a strong Christian connection in the giving of aid, as most of it came through indiscriminate almsgiving from the doors of the city's wealthy. Elberfeld weathered economic downturns in the 1820s and into the 1830s producing rising unemployment, high food prices, and increased taxes. Finally, in 1840 due to inadequate solutions to a growing problem, the church relinquished its role and a communal system of poor relief regulated by the municipal government was established in 1841 that would be an important precursor to the Elberfeld System's founding in 1853.<sup>97</sup>

### **Influence of Hamburg Poor Relief**

The initial reorganization of poor relief within Elberfeld came ideologically and structurally from a set of reforms begun in the commercial center of Hamburg in the late eighteenth century. Hamburg's effort at reorganizing their poor relief operations served as a viable model for Elberfeld in that the two cities shared many common features, particularly a shared desire for reform as a result of economic changes. However, Hamburg and Elberfeld were not alone in this desire. Many other central European cities, such as Berlin, Bremen, Augsburg, Hanover, Lübeck, Mainz, and Vienna, also began discussing a need for reform and implementing changes in the 1770s and 1780s.<sup>98</sup> As the third largest city in Central Europe, behind Vienna and Berlin, Hamburg's economy in the mid-eighteenth century centered on commerce and manufacturing. As

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<sup>97</sup> *Armenordnungen 1841-1849*, RII 51, Stadtarchiv Wuppertal.

<sup>98</sup> Mary Lindemann, *Patriots and Paupers: Hamburg 1712-1830*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 111.



it grew, so too did its demands on poor relief. Citizens of the city began to notice the increased presence of a new type of poverty, whose sufferers they termed *die arbeitende Arme* or working poor.<sup>99</sup> These poor were laborers struck by poverty not from the typical culprits of old age, disability, or sickness but rather as a result of insufficient wages, underemployment, or the high price of rent or food, and individuals found themselves displaced by fluctuations in the market. When disturbances in the economy occurred, whether recessions, tariffs, embargos, or political disturbances, such as the Seven Years War (1756-1763), the socio-economic existence of the city's inhabitants was severely threatened. As the problem became more pronounced, city leaders began to question whether older forms of relief could adequately manage, particularly since the older ecclesiastical based assistance was largely decentralized, informal, and therefore ripe for inefficiency. Elberfeld was in a similar place as its institutions struggled to keep pace with growing industrial expansion and rapid population growth.

By the late 1780s there was wholesale agreement amongst Hamburg's elite for an overhaul of its poor relief system. The chief strategists for this reorganization were two early social reformers Caspar Voght (1752-1839) and Johann Georg Büsch (1728-1800). The men together represent two important elements of this new system's ideas and application. Büsch would be primarily responsible for the ideological basis of the restructuring, while Voght would help carry out the system in practice. Serving as one of the first directors for the new General Poor Relief, Voght helped spread the system's ideas throughout Europe as he became actively involved in other poor relief reform efforts throughout Europe.<sup>100</sup> Büsch's formal role in Hamburg was Professor of Mathematics at the city's Academic Gymnasium but his more important, but informal, role was that of a national economist. Büsch was the one who was able to "close the gap between the

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<sup>99</sup> Lindemann, *Patriots and Paupers*, 4.

<sup>100</sup> Lindemann, *Patriots and Paupers*, 125

intellectual and mercantile communities” and bring a real sense of “practical mindedness of the Enlightenment” to discussions on social issues.<sup>101</sup> Büsch asserted that real wealth was correlated to the movement of wealth from one hand to another, simply on its possession by an individual, group of individuals, or the city overall. If wealth flowed uninhibited from one person to another then this was evidence of strong economic conditions in which the most people shared in the wealth’s benefits. This made Büsch a staunch supporter of free trade.

Büsch’s perception regarding the issue of poverty was informed by his beliefs in free trade. Specifically, Büsch argued that “the sluggish turnover of money” was chiefly responsible for the new poverty witnessed on Hamburg’s streets.<sup>102</sup> Part of the problem stemmed from the nature of the Hamburg economy in that as a commercial center for trade it relied heavily on imports and those who did not operate within the trade industry were excluded from many of its benefits. Additionally, those who were adversely affected by the economic structure were reduced to begging, and Büsch argued that the practice of almsgiving exacerbated the problem because it kept those in need of aid from being consumers, and yet it was their only option. Büsch qualified what he saw happening by describing Hamburg as “a true beggars metropolis.”<sup>103</sup> Thus, poor relief needed to be redirected away from almsgiving and indiscriminate relief into a more well-organized structure that put those in need to work. This was not to be a private endeavor but a greater communal responsibility.

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<sup>101</sup> Lindemann, *Patriots and Paupers*, 94.

<sup>102</sup> Lindemann, *Patriots and Paupers*, 95. See also Büsch, “Abhandlung von dem Geldumlauf in anhaltender Rücksicht auf die Staatswirthschaft und Handlung,” in *Schriften über Staatswirthschaft und Handlung*, vol. 2 (1780), 489-514.

<sup>103</sup> Johann Georg Büsch, “Allgemeine Winke zur Verbesserung des Armenwesens,” in *Zwei kleine Schiften*, (1786), unpaginated; Lindemann, 96.

For Hamburg's reorganization efforts Büsch posited several important features that would be heavily influential for the Elberfeld System. First, Büsch's system targeted what he described as 'nonculpable poor' or working poor, those who were thrust into poverty through no fault of their own. The 'nonculpable poor' were a distinct group in that they wanted to work, and many did but found themselves underemployed, but could not find jobs (*die arbeitende Arme*). This was not to be confused with the 'deserving poor' meaning those who were poor due to sickness, disability, old age or too young or with the 'undeserving poor' (culpable poor) who chose a life of idleness. Therefore, Büsch argued that for the nonculpable working poor the solution should always first and foremost be finding them work, rather than providing handouts or placing them into workhouses. Second, Büsch's reform vision supported the idea that poor relief should be a civic obligation taken on specifically by those of the middle-class who had previously been left out of civic responsibility but were now able to take part in shaping local government. This idea is evidence of the Enlightenment's impact on Hamburg's citizens blending civic engagement, individualism, and republican political ideals. Within poor relief, serving as a poor guardian was a natural first step on the civic career ladder but would ideally entrench those in the community to a civic pride and foster deeper commitments to republican institutions.

Büsch believed poor relief needed to be individualized to be the most effective at solving, not just treating, the problem of poverty. He advocated for the role of *Armenpfleger*, or poor guardian, to oversee and know the poor in personal ways in order to adequately treat their condition. He also asserted a different level of organization through breaking the city down into districts believing it was the best way to manage the large numbers of a city's inhabitants. Each district would have an overseer and be responsible for those poor amongst them. According to Büsch, "larger cities fostered anonymity...Lack of knowledge, lack of oversight, and lack of

contact were the greatest obstacles to a good poor relief.”<sup>104</sup> This individualized nature of poor relief would be the most important influencer for the Elberfeld System and as Elberfeld perfected this idea it would be the feature most sought after by other German, British, and American social reformers.

Investment in a more efficient poor relief system by individuals dedicating their time, knowledge, and especially resources was the best way to ensure poverty was being dealt with properly. Büsch, Voght, and the rest of Hamburg’s elite were vehemently opposed to the idea of imposing a poor tax onto the city’s citizens, arguing that it fundamentally separated citizen accountability to the system and allowed individuals to be blissfully ignorant of what was going on. Furthermore, a poor tax would function as a moral and financial scapegoat for the middle- and upper-classes by convincing them that nothing else needed to be done when taxes were ‘solving the problem.’ When individuals were personally invested into the system’s daily performance and overall outcome they could not sit back and criticize local government or find fault somewhere else, but rather know the challenges personally and seek practical solutions. While Hamburg’s political structure as a free city made it unique in the German lands of the eighteenth century, this notion of civic responsibility was less novel to Elberfeld’s leaders in the late 1840s as it too embraced the connection between poor relief and responsibilities of citizenship.

The final two features of Büsch’s reforms that were influential for Elberfeld’s later plans dealt with building a rapport between those impoverished and the larger community. Büsch argued that it was more important to achieve and maintain a trust with the poor than have a relationship based on discipline and punishment. The workhouse, for example, damaged the possibility of trust

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<sup>104</sup> Lindemann, *Patriots and Paupers*, 114.

because it lumped all types of the impoverished together and eliminated the ability to know the condition of the poor. Thus, the idea of individualized poor relief and participation by citizens as poor guardians would build this essential trust between pauper and caretaker, and “the aid afforded him would be more effective, the advice more pertinent, and the disciplining and educational means more opportune.”<sup>105</sup>

The other form of confidence and trust Büsch advocated was with the wider public, providing them with a plethora of information regarding how the poor relief system operated, who it was providing aid to, how funds were being used, and what obstacles were yet to be overcome. The idea was to make citizens feel included at all stages and enjoy the success but also share and understand setbacks. This unfettered access to information should be done, according to Büsch, through the printing of annual reports. Hamburg’s reformers took this idea a step further and connected it again to the responsible nature of republican governments arguing that sovereigns might deem access to information as unnecessary or even as a check on their actions, but this was essential for republics whose existence rested on public engagement. Just as the individualized nature of poor relief was the feature most emulated by the Elberfeld System, so too was the access of information through the printing of reports. For example, the Elberfeld leaders printed yearly reports on who served as poor guardians, how much and what kind of aid was given out, and a summary of all accounts to the larger community. It was through this wide publication effort that other German communities and reformers from other nations could see concretely how the System was organized and its effectiveness, encouraging its notoriety and ease of emulation in other areas. Even the Charity Organization Societies would adhere to this principle of access to information by

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<sup>105</sup> Johann Georg Büsch, “Vorschläge zur Verbesserung des Hamburgischen Armenwesens 1786” as cited in Lindemann, 115.

producing a publishing frenzy on reports, speeches, accounts, and anecdotes as evidence for the best practices of others.

### **The Elberfeld System**

Utilizing the important foundations set forth by Büsch in Hamburg, Elberfeld's reformed relief structure hinged on increased citizen participation within the sphere of poverty. Building upon the earlier established relationship while under French occupation, the civic responsibility of Elberfeld's citizens returned as they were key instruments within welfare management. Using some guiding principles of the Hamburg System, the city established a new poor administration that was a branch of the municipal government having twenty-three members to its council. The city was divided into ten large districts each with an overseer which were in turn further divided into five smaller districts each assigned one *Armenpfleger* (poor guardian).<sup>106</sup> These guardians, however, had limited responsibilities, unlike their future manifestations, and carried out only what was instructed of them by the central administration.

With guardians operating on a system of honorary service the need for individuals to serve meant including more middle-class citizens into this responsibility. The attempted reorganization in 1841 was short lived, however, due to inadequacies within its organizational method, a difficulty of receiving enough financial support from the city, and the added burden of ever-increasing needs amongst residents. By 1851 the local churches in Elberfeld attempted to resume control of poor relief citing rising costs and haphazard and chaotic administration as evidence for why this initial reorganization effort was not working and needed to be resumed under parochial leadership.<sup>107</sup>

Critics claimed that "the number of visitors was found to be too few; the duties of the visitor were

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<sup>106</sup> *Armenordnungen 1841-1849*, RII 51, Stadtarchiv Wuppertal. Giovanna Berger, *Die ehrenamtliche Tätigkeit in der Sozialarbeit: Motive, Tendenzen, Probleme: Dargestellt am Beispiel des Elberfelder Systems*, (Frankfurt a.M: Peter Lang Verlag, 1979), 42-43.

<sup>107</sup> Berger, *Die ehrenamtliche Tätigkeit in der Sozialarbeit*, 43.

neglected; the pauperism and expenditure increased; and the condition of the town with reference to its pauper population – their complete demoralisation – was source of much uneasiness to the more respectable inhabitants.”<sup>108</sup> The idea was to cope with the city’s poverty problem by various religious bodies caring for their own members. This attempt, however, was abandoned by the Catholic and Calvinist congregations within the next year, due in large part to the overwhelming cost and continued growth of those impoverished, and only the Lutherans held out until 1854.<sup>109</sup> While the churches had to relinquish their role in administering relief, the new system of 1853 would be significantly influenced by the city’s Calvinist congregation. The Reformed Church’s understanding of poverty and work was shaped by their belief that work brought people closer to God and that God helped those who helped themselves. Therefore, poverty was a temporal manifestation of inward sin and, without change, would lead to eternal damnation. Work was the solution to fight this sin. Self-improvement through the virtues of self-control, individual discipline, thriftiness, sober mindedness, and perseverance ensured a protection from poverty according to Calvinist beliefs. While the Elberfeld System would not fall under the direct control of the Calvinist church, it would wholly embrace the notion that work was always the solution to ending impoverishment.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> British Parliamentary Papers, 1872 [C. 516] Local Government Report, *First Annual Report* (1871-1872), “The Poor Law System of Elberfeld” Report from Andrew Doyle, Esq., iii-iv. and E.P. Hennock, *The Origin of the Welfare State in England and Germany, 1850-1914*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 52.

<sup>109</sup> “The Poor Law System of Elberfeld” Report from Andrew Doyle, Esq., iii-iv. and E.P. Hennock, *The Origin of the Welfare State in England and Germany*, 52. Doyle asserted that the Lutherans held out as long as they did because its members were ‘reputed to be the least pauperised class of the community.’ The continued control of the Lutherans over their poor was an interesting point of comparison, and ultimately support, for the Elberfeld System to see two systems work side-by-side. It was found that the Lutheran poor relief exceeded the proportion of cost compared to the municipal relief by thirty percent.

<sup>110</sup> Hennock, *The Origin of the Welfare State in England and Germany*, 53 and Leen van Molle, ed., *The Dynamics of Religious Reform in Northern Europe, 1780-1920: Charity and Social Welfare*, Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2017), 14-15. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 1905.

The official reorganization of Elberfeld's poor relief plan took effect in 1853.<sup>111</sup> The specifics of the system originated from a group of three bourgeois industrialists and bankers, Daniel von der Heydt (1802-1874)<sup>112</sup>, Gustav Schlieper (1837-1899), and David Peters (1808-1874). Its principles were laid out in the *Armen Ordnung*, or General Poor Law, in July 1852 and would be revised in 1861, 1876, and 1890. The primary purpose of the General Poor Law was for the establishment of a Poor Law Administration, *Städtische Armen-Verwaltung*.<sup>113</sup> This body included a president, four members of the town council, and four citizens "usually selected from the wealthy and more distinguished inhabitants."<sup>114</sup> The four citizens were appointed to their positions for three years and would retire by rotation, always leaving at least three citizen members with extensive knowledge and experience of how the system worked.<sup>115</sup> After retiring, the citizens were eligible for re-election and the annual yearbooks kept by the system indicate that they generally were re-elected. This body was required to convene every two weeks and if there was an emergency the President could call a special meeting. Its chief responsibilities, as quoted in W. Grisewood and A.F. Hanewinkel's observations, were: "To inquire into the position of the poorer classes of the population, and to ascertain the cause of their pauperism; to take steps to avoid such pauperism by serviceable arrangements, or to bring such matters under the notice of the municipality; to make up the annual budget for the whole of the Poor Law Department, and to present it for sanction to the Municipal Council; to see that the poor relief, as per budget, is properly spent, and that any resolutions of the Council are properly carried out; to examine the annual

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<sup>111</sup> BR 0007 Nr. 1668: Armenanstalt zu Elberfeld Bd. 6 1852-1865, 10. *Neue Armenordnung für die Gemeinde Elberfeld, beschlossen in der Gemeinderaths: Sitzung vom 9 Juli 1852*, Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen.

<sup>112</sup> His brother, August Von der Heydt, was the Minister of Commerce and Industry in Prussia from 1848-1862 and then again from 1866-67.

<sup>113</sup> *Armenordnung für die Stadt Elberfeld und Geschäftsordnung für die städtische Armen-Verwaltung* daselbst vom 9. Juli 1852. Wiedergeprüft am 4. Januar 1861, am 21. November 1876 und am 2. Dezember 1890.

<sup>114</sup> Doyle, "The Poor Law System of Elberfeld," v.

<sup>115</sup> When the first instance of retiring citizen members came about the decision was made to draw lots and then the following years would be done according to age.



statement of accounts, receipts, and payments, and prepare [an] annual report at the close of each year.”<sup>116</sup>

Below the *Armen-Verwaltung* was the backbone of the Elberfeld system, the *Armenvorsteher* or *Bezirksvorsteher*, district overseers, and *Armenpfleger*, poor guardians. These positions were unpaid but compulsory for citizens of Elberfeld. Every male citizen who eligible to vote (*stimmfähiger*) were required to serve as guardians or overseers, similar to jury duty in today’s context. Officials broke the city into districts and the citizens within a district determined for themselves who made “the most efficient visitors or overseers” and then nominated them to the Council for appointment.<sup>117</sup> If an individual refused to serve they forfeited their right to vote in municipal affairs for three to six years and had to pay “an eighth to a fourth higher communal taxes.”<sup>118</sup> There were several valid excuses that would permit some citizens exempt from the requirement of serving including ill health, affairs that would require long or frequent absence from the city, being over the age of sixty, holding another public office, or another special circumstances determined by members of the city council.<sup>119</sup> This compulsory feature was not new or unique to the Elberfeld System. Most German towns relied on citizens volunteering their services in the realm of poor relief. However, the new structure of the Elberfeld System, with its emphasis on individualized relationships with the poor, did significantly intensify the demands placed on citizen volunteers.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> W. Grisewood and A.F. Hanewinkel, *The Elberfeld System of Poor Law Relief*, (Liverpool: D. Marples & Co, 1898), 4-5.

<sup>117</sup> Doyle, “The Poor Law System of Elberfeld,” vi.

<sup>118</sup> W. Walter Edwards, *The Poor Law Experiment at Elberfeld*, 679.

<sup>119</sup> *Poor-law in Foreign Countries*, (1875), 237.

<sup>120</sup> Hennock, *The Origin of the Welfare State in England and Germany*, 54.

The compulsory component of the German poor relief system was both unique and a responsibility of citizenship, and therefore a great honor. Supporters of the Elberfeld System argued that this was reflected in the continued service of its citizens even after they had served their required three-year terms. For example, in 1898 there were over eighty-six individuals listed as having served over twenty-five years or more as a poor visitor. By 1903, the fiftieth anniversary of the system, the number had increased to 110.<sup>121</sup> In 1910 one poor guardian, Abraham Schreiner, served as a poor guardian for fifty years and was honored on the occasion of his ‘Golden Jubilee.’<sup>122</sup> The continued years of dedication of those serving twenty-five or fifty years was testament, according to its admirers, to how the System benefited not just the impoverished but its more well-to-do citizens. Their experience as guardians instilled within them an understanding of civic responsibility and reflected the Elberfeld System’s key philosophy that it took constant individualized knowledge of the poor’s condition to effectively reduce its presence within a community. When British Government inspectors W. Hanewinkle, J.S. Davy, and Charles Loch visited Elberfeld in 1898 and met with the President of the poor administration, Ewald Aders, he quipped to the visitors: “In order to find out how the Poor Law administration is looked upon in Elberfeld, you have only to ask a citizen if he is a visitor; he will answer either that he is, or that he has been, or he will blush with the consciousness that he has not had that honor conferred upon him.”<sup>123</sup> The high number of individuals who had years of service to their names indicated that honorary public service within Germany was of utmost importance for its larger civic culture.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> *Städtliche Armen-Verwaltung Elberfeld. Jahres-Bericht für das Rechnungsjahr 1888-89.* W. Grisewood and A.F. Hanewinkel, *Jubilee Celebrations of the Elberfeld Poor Law*, 1903.

<sup>122</sup> *Städtische Armen-verwaltung Elberfeld. Jahres-Bericht für das Rechnungsjahr 1909-1910.* (April 1, 1909-bis März 31, 1910), 5.

<sup>123</sup> W. Grisewood and A.F. Hanewinkel, *The Elberfeld System of Poor Law Relief*, 10.

<sup>124</sup> Hennock, *The Origin of the Welfare State in England and Germany*, 55-56.

According to the British government inspector, Andrew Doyle, who bore witness to the intricacies of the system in 1871, the appointment process of poor guardians was one marked by a uniquely “liberal spirit” in which a citizen’s religion or politics did not weigh in their ability to serve. The only factor was a willingness to perform the role believed to be in possession by all of Elberfeld’s citizens.<sup>125</sup> Churches in Elberfeld acted as a recruiting force for future poor guardians, especially in the System’s early years. “Church councils nominated respectable and reliable citizens” which would be confirmed by the municipal authorities.<sup>126</sup> After a confirmation, the formal induction into the office was done by a simple handshake. Doyle believed this action seemed unbinding but for citizens of Elberfeld was a symbol of a serious obligation and commitment to the larger community. The body of poor guardians came from Elberfeld’s professional-business classes, white-collar workers, and master craftsmen. The neighboring town of Barmen in 1870 made a list of its poor guardians that included their occupations. The most prevalent occupation was that of a merchant (*Kaufmann*), such as Gustav Wilkes and Emil Raue, followed by carpenters (*Schreiner*) like Franz Padberg and Carl Clemens, teachers (*Lehrer*) including Abraham Vollmer and Wilhelm Lingenberg, and ribbon casters (*Bandwirker*) such as Friedrich Flanhardt and Heinrich Gründel Jr.<sup>127</sup> The trend of acquiring poor guardians from these professions continued even as the Elberfeld System would spread beyond the Rhine region. In 1903 Dresden had 795 poor relief officials in which twenty-five percent came from artisans and tradesmen, another twenty percent came from commercial occupations, and eight percent from

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<sup>125</sup> *Städtische Armenverwaltung nach Einführung des Elberfelder Systems: Liste von Personen, die von der städtischen Armenverwaltung zu Elberfeld für das Amt eines Armenpflegers vorgeschlagen wurden und ein. Bericht über die Tätigkeit des Elberfelder Frauenvereins innerhalb der Armenpflege.* March 7, 1884, RII 101, Stadtarchiv Wuppertal.

<sup>126</sup> Hennock, *The Origin of the Welfare State in England and Germany*, 54.

<sup>127</sup> *Verzeichnis des Personals der städtischen Armenverwaltung, Einteilung der offenen Armenpflege in 22 Bezirke und 264 Quartiere und örtliche Begrenzung derselben; Angabe der Armenärzte und deren Distrikte sowie Bezeichnung der Bezirksversammlungslokale*, 1870, RII 8, Stadtarchiv Wuppertal.

industrial entrepreneurs and manufactures. The diversity of occupational backgrounds held by guardians demonstrates “the attraction of this kind of service” for all social classes.<sup>128</sup>

Under the Poor Law, Elberfeld was broken down into smaller districts with each section being entrusted to an overseer. The overseer would then assess the number of guardians needed for that district. Each poor guardian was assigned no more than four families under his care. This restricted number of families given to the guardian was done for two primary reasons. First, since guardians came from Elberfeld’s merchant, artisan, and business classes they therefore had the responsibilities of their vocation to attend to along with the responsibilities of their own families. Overburdening the guardian with a large number of cases could likely discourage their continued participation or even keep others from serving to avoid over work. Second, a small case load allowed visitors to fulfill the key element of the Elberfeld System – a careful investigation into the circumstances of those seeking aid. This practice of no more than four families assigned was only increased in time of great distress, but even then, it was only for a short period of time until more guardians could be added to the rolls or the period of distress subsided, whichever was quicker.<sup>129</sup> The number of districts and poor guardians was determined by the city council and would be reassessed yearly. When the System began in 1853, Elberfeld was divided into 8 districts with 112 poor guardians.<sup>130</sup> In 1870 the numbers expanded to 18 districts with 252 poor guardians. By 1890

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<sup>128</sup> Hennock, *The Origin of the Welfare State in England and Germany*, 56. Numbers for Dresden’s occupational breakdown of poor guardians comes from the Table in Wolfgang Hofmann, ‘Aufgaben und Struktur der kommunalen Selbstverwaltung in der Zeit der Hochindustrialisierung’, in Kurt G.A. Jeserich, Hans Pohl, Georg-Christoph von Unruth, eds., *Deutsche Verwaltungsgeschichte*, volume 3, (Stuttgart, 1984), 618. Additional occupational breakdown charts for Elberfeld and other cities can be found in Kayser, *Stellung*, 13 and Emil Münsterberg, *Das Elberfelder Systems*, (Leipzig: Dunker and Humbolt, 1903), 25.

<sup>129</sup> A. Lammers, “The Town of Elberfeld” in *Das Armenwesen und die Armengesetzgebung in Europäischen Staaten*, ed. A. Emminghaus, (1870), 98-99.

<sup>130</sup> *Städtische Armenverwaltung nach Einführung des Elberfelder Systems: Städtische Armenverwaltung in Elberfeld. Drei Quartal-Berichte (umfassend die Monate Januar- September) des Jahres 1853*, RII 96, Stadtarchiv Wuppertal.

the amount had increased to 434 spread out in 31 districts and by 1898 the number was to 518 with 37 districts.<sup>131</sup>

Any person who found themselves destitute or without work had the right to apply for relief. Their income had to be less than what could suffice the ‘absolute necessities of life’ (*das unabweislich Notwendige*). This designation was determined based upon the cost of living for various family sizes within the city taking into account wages, the cost of lodging, food, and clothing.<sup>132</sup> Requests for relief were made directly to the assigned district guardian and in turn the guardian was required “at once [to] inquire personally and carefully into the circumstances of the case.”<sup>133</sup> This investigation was to be one in which the guardian searched out the character of the petitioner (*Hülfesuchenden*). It was described as being “an examination so close and searching, so absolutely inquisitorial, that no man who could possibly escape from it would submit to it.”<sup>134</sup> Questions included basic biographical information: name, age, place of birth, how long they had lived in Elberfeld, and if they had lived somewhere else and for how long (important for the settlement/residency qualification), if they were married, had any children and how many, and if these children are of working or school age. It was expected in Elberfeld that everyone who could work, was working.<sup>135</sup> The physical health of the petitioner and his family was also recorded along with whether he and his family members were living a “moral and honest life.”<sup>136</sup> There was also an investigation into the immediate extended family of the petitioner including surviving parents,

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<sup>131</sup> *Armenordnung für die Stadt Elberfeld und Geschäftsordnung für die städtische Armen-Verwaltung* daselbst vom 9. Juli 1852. Wiedergeprüft am 4. Januar 1861, am 21. November 1876 und am 2. Dezember 1890, Article 4. Doyle, vi. W. Grisewood and A.F. Hanewinkel, *The Elberfeld System of Poor Law Relief*, 3. Victor Böhmert, *Das Armenwesen in 77 deutschen Städten*, (Dresden, 1886), 51.

<sup>132</sup> *Städtische Armenverwaltung. Elberfeld. Instruction für die Bezirksvorsteher und Armenpfleger* vom 4 Januar 1861.

<sup>133</sup> A. Lammers, “The Town of Elberfeld”, 99.

<sup>134</sup> Doyle, “The Poor Law System of Elberfeld,” xv.

<sup>135</sup> *Städtische Armen-Verwaltung Elberfeld. Instruction für die Bezirksvorsteher und Armenpfleger* vom 4 Januar 1861. “Anlagen A”

<sup>136</sup> Doyle, “The Poor Law System of Elberfeld,” xvi.

in-laws, grand-parents, and any children not living with the family. The extended family was included in the inquiry given that the legal precedent asserted that if there were family members financially able to care for the poor then it was their responsibility rather than that of the administration. If the extended family failed to do so they faced possible imprisonment for dereliction of duty.<sup>137</sup> In order for a person seeking aid to receive help it had to be proven that he could not exist without it. Therefore, the poor guardian was responsible for ascertaining the cause of pauperism. In a description of this investigation it was noted that it was “not a merely nominal or superficial inquiry in which the applicant has no difficulty is palming off some plausible story of distress and the cause of it, but is, what it professes to be, a strict investigation into the circumstances of the man’s life and present position.”<sup>138</sup>

Once the guardian determined that a petitioner was worthy of relief, and this evaluation was at the sole discretion of the poor guardian, the petitioner’s case was brought to the next district meeting where the guardian would share his findings. These meetings occurred every two weeks and it would be here where the amount and type of relief would be determined. Cases were decided on a majority vote by the district guardians and the overseer. Meetings were typically held in communal locations throughout the district, such as a schoolroom. Guardians submitted their reports, regardless of whether or not new petitions of relief needed to be heard. At one district meeting in Elberfeld during October 1871 no new cases were heard but eighteen continuing cases were updated and revised on their continued support. Two of those were recorded by Doyle:

One was a case of non-resident relief, an aged widow resident in Elberfeld, but settled in Düsseldorf. The only peculiarity about the case was that the pauper received from Düsseldorf a large amount of relief than she would have received had she been settled in Elberfeld...Some of the applications showed that the visitor

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<sup>137</sup> Doyle, “The Poor Law System of Elberfeld,” xii.

<sup>138</sup> Doyle, “The Poor Law System of Elberfeld,” xvi.

within whose district they were comprised have very minute knowledge of the circumstances of each case. In one case a visitor proposed that the relief of an aged widow should be reduced upon the ground that the doctor had certified that she was capable of getting more than the sum returned as “earnings.” The visitor of the district thought there must be some mistake, he “knew that she could not get more.” The medical certificate was examined and was found to be dated so far back as April. Temporary relief was sanctioned, and an order made that a fresh medical certificate should be obtained and produced at the next meeting. Another case was that of a widow with two children who was in receipt, as weekly relief, of 45 *silbergroschen*. It was reported that since the last meeting the two children had got employment, and were now able to earn 5 *silbergroschen*, with an intimation that a further reduction would be made as soon as it was seen that the earnings of the children were a source of permanent income. Before the termination of the sitting, each visitor received from the overseer the amount in cash of the estimated expenditure of his district for the next fortnight.<sup>139</sup>

Doyle went on to assert that while these examples could seem trivial or common-place to the reader, they “illustrate the every-day working of the system.” The guardian did have one final element of autonomy in his investigations of the poor which allowed him to provide immediate assistance, in kind or in funds, if the case was particularly distressing. Yet even then it was to be small and the case still brought before the district at its next meeting. While observing the system in action Doyle was careful to note that while the conditions for requesting relief seemed “harsh and oppressively rigorous” they were not without “injunction to deal with the poor mercifully,” and that if a guardian believed the law was “unavoidably hard” he was still to “administer it at least in a spirit of kindness and Christian forbearance.”<sup>140</sup> While records fail to elucidate the experience of this inquisition from the perspective of those impoverished, Doyle notes on his visit to inspect the poor relief system in Düsseldorf that many of the poor found the process of requesting aid less strenuous than that of Elberfeld.

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<sup>139</sup> Doyle, “The Poor Law System of Elberfeld,” viii. Italics in original.

<sup>140</sup> Doyle, “The Poor Law System of Elberfeld,” xx.

Relief, especially that of money or food, was given on a week by week basis in Elberfeld. If petitioners received furniture or clothing then the visitor was required to go and check from time to time to ensure the pauper did not pawn the items for cash. There were restrictions on what was deemed an ‘appropriate’ use of relief funds. For example, if a member of petitioner’s family was buried using public funds and the family follows the poor-house hearse in a coach then it is believed that it “prove[s] that the relations of the deceased were able to spend money, and prove that they had obtained the use of hearse under false pretenses.” Any changes, however minor, in the condition of the application were to be noted by guardians and were considered to be under “constant surveillance.”<sup>141</sup>

A petitioner was always encouraged to find work, and if there was none to be had, then work was provided for him from the city, but this was not often a problem according to observers. If there were a large number of unemployed petitioning for relief then the city administration took it upon themselves to put them to work on a public work project, usually the improvement of a road or bridge. Furthermore, all relief recipients had a wages book (*Verdienst buch*) assigned to them that required their employer to record their daily earnings and notify of any instances of idleness or poor conduct. These records were reviewed by the poor guardian and could be grounds for their removal from receiving aid if their actions were deemed undeserving.<sup>142</sup> If their actions were considered undeserving or if petitioners pawned their relief items for cash, or suffered from pauperism as a result of idleness or drunkenness then guardians made this known to municipal police. There were strict consequences for this type of behavior. The minimum was a loss of relief from the poor administration, the maximum penalty was imprisonment for one week to one month.

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<sup>141</sup> Doyle, “The Poor Law System of Elberfeld,” xvi-xvii.

<sup>142</sup> Victor Böhmert, *Das Armenwesen in 77 deutschen Städten*, (Dresden, 1886), 49-70.



Medical care was also provided for those petitioning for relief. While a formal request would be made to the poor guardian, this request, proving its authenticity, would in turn be sent to a district medical officer. Similarly to the System's structure, medical relief for the city was broken into districts each having its own medical officer.<sup>143</sup> The medical officer was bound to meet with every pauper and his family who applied for medical help. The officer wrote prescriptions for each case which would in turn be taken to the apothecary to be filled. Each year the poor administration would establish a contract with one of the city's apothecaries to be the designated medical dispensary and the prescriptions could only be filled there. The prescriptions were used as vouchers for both medicine and payment. In 1869, medical officers wrote 2,882 prescriptions.<sup>144</sup> The primary difference between the role of medical officers and poor guardians was that it was a paid position.

The poor administration would, likewise, meet every two weeks in the town hall and discuss the cases and findings of the district meetings. The district overseers were required to attend so as to give an account of the poor in their charge and speak to issues that emerged with their assigned poor guardians. This could include questions of the legal requirement to care for a petitioner, jurisdictional disputes, and estimates on expenditures. While the poor administration held the primary leadership function over the Elberfeld System, they were also in charge of overseeing the indoor poor relief structures of the city. These included a poor house (*Armenhaus*), a hospital (*Krankenhaus*) and orphanage (*Waisenhaus*).

The poor house of Elberfeld was fundamentally different than its more notorious British counterpart. Its primary residents were the city's old and infirm who were without homes or

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<sup>143</sup> There were five in 1871 when Andrew Doyle visited Elberfeld.

<sup>144</sup> Doyle, "The Poor Law System of Elberfeld," xii.

families to take care of them. Whereas the British workhouse served as a means of testing the destitution of an individual and restricting his relief within the institution. Consequently, residents of the Elberfeld poor house had a greater level of autonomy and freedom than the inmates of British poorhouses, whose character was more like that of a reformatory. In Elberfeld, they could come and go as they pleased and those still physically able often sought work within the city to help to defray the cost of their living in the house. When visiting the poor house, Doyle noted that its inhabitants were “comfortable and contented” and living “as people of their class live in their homes...they are sufficiently clad; the dietary is good...In short, an old Elberfeld pauper smoking his eternal pipe in the *Aufenthatszimmer* or “day-room” of the *Armen-haus* may well feel that he has got a comfortable asylum for the close of his days.”<sup>145</sup> The same would most assuredly not be said for observers, or inhabitants, of the British poorhouse.

The hospital and orphanage were the other two institutions of indoor-relief within Elberfeld and managed by the Poor Administration. The hospital was an extension of the medical relief services and petitioners could request help when they made known their need of aid and it was paid for by the administration. The orphanage was home to both orphaned and deserted children. They were educated in reading, writing, arithmetic, singing, and learning industrial work at a young age so as to turn them out into industrious laborers.

When the city’s leaders put forth the new, and somewhat radical, restructuring of their poor relief plan in 1852 the Elberfeld’s bourgeois was overwhelming skeptical. While there was widespread agreement that reform needed to take place there were hesitations from citizens characterizing the scheme as “utopian” and “impracticable.”<sup>146</sup> However, their hesitations were

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<sup>145</sup> Doyle, “The Poor Law System of Elberfeld,” xiii.

<sup>146</sup> Doyle, “The Poor Law System of Elberfeld,” xxiii.

alleviated when the System's success was proven by the numbers. In fact, statistical figures were used as the most influential measure to evaluate the worthiness of the System. It was the statistical proof on costs and lessening numbers of paupers that encouraged the System's spread to other German cities and then to garner the attention of European and American reformers. The fact that the number of paupers, on the whole, steadily decreased in the time since the System's application was testament that the methods and administration worked and was therefore worthy of emulation. Additionally, the reduction of expenditures was of particular importance since one of the problems of the old system was indiscriminate giving and therefore uncontrollable costs. As is seen in the Table 2.2, there was a significant reduction in the numbers of those requesting aid in the first year of application going from eight percent of the population to 2.9 percent. By the mid-1860s the proportion of the population requesting relief remained steady at about two percent. These numbers reflect only those requesting aid that was based upon the new classification in determining who was worthy of relief. Therefore, the numbers do not account for actual conditions of the poor yet they were used as a tangible selling point for the System and its admirers.

The Elberfeld System was financed through two separate funds within the city budget. One fund came from taxes devoted specifically for the poor administration. These funds come from the taxation on interest derived from money invested in the reserve fund of the Saving Bank in Elberfeld, taxing the profits from the local newspaper *Täglicher Anzeiger*, from police fines, the licenses of theaters and concerts, and payments made to the hospital. Another portion of funds came from general taxes of the municipality to supplement what was not covered from the other taxes. Funding from these sources was important not only because it enabled the System to operate but because it did not impose a direct poor relief tax on citizens, mirroring the actions of those in Hamburg who warned against this as it could encourage apathy or resentment among citizens.

Table 2.2: Average Number of Paupers in Elberfeld and Expenditures<sup>147</sup>

<b>Year</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Number of Paupers</b>	<b>Expenditure (Thalers.)</b>
1852	50,364	4,000	59,548
1853* New System adopted	50,418	1,460	25,606
1866	64,963	1,370	24,842
1867	65,321	1,496	27,182
1868	67,000	1,408	25,559
1869	71,000	1,062	25,739

The first two locations within Germany to which the Elberfeld System spread was its neighboring cities of Barmen and Krefeld. Barmen adopted the system in 1863 and Krefeld a year later. Both cities were similar to Elberfeld in their industrial development and subsequent population growth which placed demands on the traditional forms of poor relief. Again, using statistics as the basis for evaluating the effectiveness of the newly applied system as reformers did, records indicated that within the first year of application in Barmen the number of cases evaluated by the poor administration had dropped approximately 26 percent. By 1870 the average number of cases per year was 693 with a population of 71,000.<sup>148</sup> There were, however, differences between the system's application in Elberfeld than in Barmen. While in Elberfeld a poor guardian

<sup>147</sup> *Städtische Armenverwaltung nach Einführung des Elberfelder Systems: Städtische Armenverwaltung in Elberfeld. Drei Quartal-Berichte (umfassend die Monate Januar- September) des Jahres 1853*, RII 96, Stadtarchiv Wuppertal; *Städtische Armenverwaltung nach Einführung des Elberfelder Systems: Städtische Armenverwaltung Elberfeld. Verhandlungen der Hauptversammlungen der Stadt Armenverwaltung Januar 14, 1867- Januar 30, 1868 mit den Jahresberichten für 1866 und 1867*, RII 99, Stadtarchiv Wuppertal, and Doyle, "The Poor Law System of Elberfeld," xxi-xxii.

<sup>148</sup> Doyle, "The Poor Law System of Elberfeld," xxiii-xxiv. In 1862 Barmen relieved 914 cases. In 1863 the number of cases was 678. This seems to be even more impressive when noted that 1863 was a year of economic depression within the city.

was assigned to no more than four cases at a time, Barmen extended this number to six. Another distinguishing feature of Barmen was the role of the religious communities in providing in-door relief. Rather than turning the operation of the orphanage, poor house, or hospital over to the public administration like in Elberfeld, local churches continued to oversee these institutions as they had done previously.

Krefeld's adoption of the Elberfeld System was equally noticeable. The poor relief methods before restructuring were significantly haphazard and unkept and therefore statistical comparison from before application and after are not possible. Doyle noted however, "it is unquestionable...that under the old system mendicancy had grown to be an intolerable public nuisance...Formerly the distribution of relief gave rise constantly to scandalous disorders that sometimes necessitated the interference of the police."<sup>149</sup> With the new system in place, poor guardians put an end to the indiscriminate allocation of relief and "carefully scrutinized" requests made to the administration. Just as in Barmen, Krefeld adjusted the system's administration to fit the locality's needs. Most notable was the shift in the earnings scale adopted in Krefeld as compared to that of Elberfeld. The earnings scale was determined based upon the minimum amount of income an individual needed to provide the basic necessities of life for themselves and their immediate family members. The earnings scale was also used as the measure by which how much direct aid was needed to be given to an individual or family to supplement what was already being earned. If it was proven by investigation by a poor guardian that the individual could earn the needed amount to survive, or they had family members responsible for them who could provide, then relief would be denied. To better fit the community's economic situation, the pay

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<sup>149</sup> Doyle, "The Poor Law System of Elberfeld," xxvi-xxv.

rates in Krefeld were lower than that of Elberfeld. It was the malleable nature of the Elberfeld System that drew social reformers from other German cities to its core principles.

### **Women and the Elberfeld System**

Given the relationship between the role of the poor guardian and its responsibilities of citizenship within the Elberfeld System, it is unsurprising that from its inception and in its first several decades all guardians were male. However, women also played an important role in the Elberfeld System and its spread. Early on women had little participation other than being recipients of relief. This was the intention of the System's founders who, as described by German social reformer Emil Münsterberg (1855-1911), excluded women not because they "valued her activity less than that of men" but because it was a civic institution in which poor guardians acted as a "representative of the community" and a "steward of community property" and women were "not authorized to participate."<sup>150</sup> However, by the 1880s Elberfeld's middle-class women began to take on a greater role in the System's operation. This came through the organization of the Elberfeld Women's Association (*Elberfelder Frauen Verein*). Initially, each district was assigned two ladies from the association who were in charge of dealing with the most urgent and exceptional cases of need. Since the organizational structure of the Elberfeld System did not easily facilitate the delving out of immediate aid, the Women's Association could deal more quickly with those needs until the cases could be proven with more investigation. The Women's Association also helped with the orphanage and caring for its children. The work of these women was highly scrutinized by the Poor Administration, making regular audits of the cost of their work and whether or not they exerted a "favorable" influence on the system. While consistently evaluated, the Elberfeld Women's Association was regularly appraised as being a positive force within municipal

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<sup>150</sup> Münsterberg, *Das Elberfelder Systems*, 31.

life.<sup>151</sup> Eventually with the growth of scientific social work in the late nineteenth century women would begin to hold a greater role in municipal poor relief. For example, in 1910 the Poor Administration yearly report recorded the presence of female poor guardians and at that point there were only seven serving out of 611 guardians.<sup>152</sup> The desire of middle-class women to work with social reform reflected the larger trends of the bourgeoisie German women's movement throughout the late nineteenth century. Within the German context, the women's movement focused more on their ability to reform modernizing society under moral principles rather than demanding legal equality and suffrage. Women could assert their gendered roles as mother and nurturer and stake a claim within the realm of poor relief arguing that these traits made them uniquely suited to work in social policy.<sup>153</sup>

Women's roles as influencers of poor relief, in turn, also made them important contributors to national identity and citizenship. This has been the subject of historian Jean Quataert whose work *Staging Philanthropy: Patriotic Women and the National Imagination in Dynastic Germany* (2001) analyzes the politics of German state-building during the "long" nineteenth century by focusing on female dynastic philanthropic organizations. She argues that it was through philanthropy that wider national identities could form around community obligations and responsibilities. While Quataert does not analyze women's role in the Elberfeld System, her argument can be applied to that context. The philanthropic practices, highly stylized and performed like those of the Elberfeld System, provided a sense of dynastic legitimacy. Furthermore, women's roles in poor relief also played a role in the formation of nation building and national identity.

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<sup>151</sup> *Städtische Armenverwaltung nach Einführung des Elberfelder Systems: Liste von Personen, die von der städtischen Armenverwaltung zu Elberfeld für das Amt eines Armenpflegers vorgeschlagen wurden und ein. Bericht über die Tätigkeit des Elberfelder Frauenvereins innerhalb der Armenpflege, March 7, 1884*, RII 101, Stadtarchiv Wuppertal.

<sup>152</sup> *Städtische Armenverwaltung Elberfeld. Jahres Bericht für das Rechnungsjahr 1909. (April 1, 1909-bis März 31, 1910)*, BR 007 NR. 43028 Armenverwaltung Elberfeld 1910-1926, Landesarchiv Nord-Rhein Westfalen.

<sup>153</sup> See Nancy R. Reagin, *A German Women's Movement: Class and Gender in Hannover, 1880-1933*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

While civic responsibilities and honorary service were targeted toward citizen-males, women in philanthropic organizations created an additional image of the nation, one focused on care and nurturing. Women saw the opportunity in social reform to fashion a service-elite directly aiding the development of a German national identity. These women understood the state not simply as a secular institution, but as one also motivated by the impetus of Christian charity. While much of German nationalism takes on a male character (*Vaterland*), Quataert argues for the significance of the *Landesmutter* in helping construct the national identity. By analyzing the role of these women, the notion of Germany's modern political system as eschewing older or more traditional political systems is broken down through her argument of dynastic legitimacy emerging from its commitment to public welfare and service to the people.<sup>154</sup>

Furthermore, the experiences of German women's associations like the *Frauen Verein* fits within larger theories of gender history. Gender historian Judith Butler postulates a theory of constrained agency in which powerful paradigms of hegemonic language and cultural norms function as a labyrinth that individuals cannot fully escape. Butler argues that individuals bring about change from frequent small shifts within the paradigm. In the aggregate, Butler contends that these small shifts can significantly restructure paradigms.<sup>155</sup> In many ways the role of women within the Elberfeld System compliments Butler's theory. Similar to Quataert's dynastic philanthropic organizations, these women were "not passive objects in history nor mere victims of its unsavory aspects, but active agents, even if...under conditions they do not fully control."<sup>156</sup> By

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<sup>154</sup> Jean Quataert, *Staging Philanthropy: Patriotic Women and the National Imagination in Dynastic Germany, 1813-1916*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

<sup>155</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>156</sup> Quataert, *Staging Philanthropy*, 295.



including women in the formation of both the welfare state and a national identity, the portrayal of this struggle is more inclusive and complex than those that only focus on male experiences.

### **Elberfeld Spreads and Bismarckian Social Insurance**

From 1853 to 1914, most German cities adopted the Elberfeld system as their poor relief management plan. Out of 200 major German cities only thirty had not adopted the Elberfeld System and its organization principles in some way or another by the outbreak of World War I.<sup>157</sup> Leading German social reformer Emil Münsterberg emphasized this development when speaking at the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the System claiming that there was “no greater” poor relief system existing within Germany and that no large German city had either not introduced its principles or “at least approached the question of its introduction.”<sup>158</sup> Before, and even after, German unification in 1871, the different German states held autonomy in managing their poor, the larger state government only ensured that the state was required to provide some form of relief. Despite states’ autonomy, it was the effective strategy, careful resource use, and diligent supervision of the poor that prompted many cities to accept the program. The Elberfeld System “was so successful that relief officials and social reformers came to see it as the embodiment of the very idea of rational, yet compassionate, assistance, and reformers would often debate whether the reorganization of relief in a specific city truly embodied the principles of the Elberfeld System.”<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Münsterberg, *Das Elberfelder System*, (1903), 44.

<sup>158</sup> Münsterberg, *Das Elberfelder System*, 44.

<sup>159</sup> Frohman, *Poor Relief and Welfare in Germany from the Reformation to World War I*, 96.

Table 2.3: Adoption of the Elberfeld Poor Relief System in Various Towns, 1853-1911<sup>160</sup>

Year	City	Year	City
1853	Elberfeld	1880	Leipzig, Dresden, Mühlheim
1862-63	Barmen, Krefeld, Duisburg, Halberstadt	1881	Kassel, Rostock Bremerhaven
1864	Essen	1882	Magdeburg, Potsdam, Stralsund
1865	Altona	1883	Frankfurt, Fulda, Zwickau
1867	Ruhrort	1884	Gotha, Halle
1868	Hagen	1885	Posen, Griefswald
1870	Neuweid	1888	Cologne
1871	Keil	1889	Aachen, Bielefeld
1874	Dortmund	1893	Hamburg, Erfurth
1875	Elbing, Stuttgart, Bremen	1895	Mainz, Münster, Breslau
1876	Siegen, Darmstadt	1898	Mannheim, Danzig
1877	Düsseldrof, Oldenburg, Naumburg	1911	Lübeck
1878	Königsberg, Landsberg, Hanau		

From the 1860s onward, industrialization inevitably initiated its effects on German society as it had done earlier in the industrial Rhineland. While industrialization helped to alleviate the mass pauperization of the 1830s and 1840s and provided jobs for potential workers, most of Germany remained poor and “a large percent of the population lived a life of frugality, even of need.”<sup>161</sup> As Germany began evolving from a rural to urban society industrial centers witnessed an initial mass exodus of the lower classes to cities where jobs were available. After the 1860s, the transition continued to occur gradually indicated by the occupational breakdown of Germany’s

<sup>160</sup> Steinmetz, *Regulating the Social*, 97. Frohman, *Poor Relief and Welfare in Germany*, 159.

<sup>161</sup> Eda Sagarra, *A Social History of Germany, 1648-1914*, (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1977), 401.

population. In 1871, about 49 percent of the population still worked in agriculture. In 1882, this number declined to 42 percent, but it was higher than the 35 percent of the population working in industry. It was not until the turn of the century that industry jobs dominated the German work force. In 1907, 42 percent worked in industry, and 28 percent worked in agriculture.<sup>162</sup> Characteristically, the move from rural to urban cities caused overcrowding, people lived in dwellings with poor sanitation and disease and worked in unsafe environments. One account on the rapid socioeconomic changes within Germany details the town of Lübeck, which would be one of the last locations to adopt the Elberfeld System, and its transformation into an urban industrial center.

They were droves of workers-the kind who differ from rural and skilled tradesmen at first sight, because they had no training except for in a few mechanical tasks, because they felt no occupational spirit, because they belonged to that class which was subsequently called proletarians...The first meager apartment houses were put up. Tall, bare, multi-floor buildings stood isolated in the middle of fields. Poor families lived there side by side in squalor, without any comfort; an unkempt, quickly dilapidating backyard adjoined directly. The space between the houses was teeming with children. But they were the children of a new population. The poverty of these people was different from the poverty of the village farm worker; their dirt was different, everything was uglier and, in its ugliness, cheekier. The industrial worker seemed to be degenerate, even when they were doing well; if they were really poor, it seemed as though foul-smelling poverty was their natural element.<sup>163</sup>

These other areas within Germany were coming face-to-face with the problems earlier industrialized areas experienced. Yet this industrialization process was more widespread and its

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<sup>162</sup> "Occupational Breakdown of Germany's Population (1882-1907)", a document from Gerd Hohorst, Jürgen Kocka, and Gerhard A. Ritter, editors, *Sozialgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch: Materialien zur Statistik des Kaiserreichs 1870-1914*. Munich, 1975, volume 2, p. 66. The statistics were compiled by the editors and drawn from the following sources: (for 1882) *Statistik des Deutschen Reichs* [Statistics of the German Reich], new version, vol. 2 (1884) and new version, vol. 4, 3 (1884); (for 1895) *Statistik des Deutschen Reichs*, new version, vol. 111 (1899); and (for 1907) *Statistik des Deutschen Reichs*, vol. 203 (1910). In *Wilhelmine Germany and the First World War, 1890-1918*, edited by Roger Chickering, Steven Chase Gummer, and Seth Rotramel, volume 5, *German History in Documents and Images*, German Historical Institute, Washington, DC ([www.germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org](http://www.germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org)).

<sup>163</sup> "Urbanization of Village Life near Lübeck after 1870", a document by Karl Scheffler. In *Forging an Empire: Bismarckian Germany, 1866-1890*, edited by James Retallack, volume 4, *German History in Documents and Images*, German Historical Institute, Washington, DC ([www.germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org](http://www.germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org)).

consequences more acute than previously known. Additionally, there had been some fundamental shifts to what Elberfeld's leaders responded to in the first half of the nineteenth century versus what was developing throughout Germany by the latter decades. The Elberfeld System's key principle, "help from person to person" (*hilfe von Mensch zu Mensch*) was a concept "based entirely on clear, static social relations" where a poor guardian could effectively know their community when a city's size was "manageable", the population "sedentary", and where the guardian lived in the neighborhood of his petitioners and reflected "a social mix of rich and poor." The concepts of the System were only possible when "it was assumed that the calamities to be remedied...required only common sense and neighborly familiarity with "the circumstances.""<sup>164</sup> Yet this relationship between poor guardian and the poor in its familiar surrounding no longer existed after 1870 and brought great concern to the German bourgeoisie. As emphasized by Andrew Lees on the rise of antiurban sentiment "urban populations consisted increasingly of a rootless proletariat whose members came to the big city in the hope of making easy fortunes and were quick to move on when opportunity appeared to beckon."<sup>165</sup> This urban landscape was not a place that would facilitate the close relationship between poor guardian and the impoverished. Rich and poor no longer lived in the same neighborhood, the poor themselves were constantly on the move so the attempt to build relationships with them was almost impossible. This was exacerbated in years of economic depression such as the Panic of 1873 (*Gründerkrise*). It was

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<sup>164</sup> Christoph Sachße und Florian Tennstedt, "Armenfürsorge, soziale Fürsorge, Sozialarbeit" in *Handbuch der deutschen Bildungsgeschichte. Vom 15. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart. Band 4: 1870 bis 1918. Von der Reichgründung bis zum Ende des Ersten Weltkriegs*, ed. Christina Berg, (Munich: C.H. Beck Verlag, 1991), 411-440, 415.

<sup>165</sup> Andrew Lees, *Cities, Sin and Social Reform in Imperial Germany*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 25.

estimated that around 200,000 workers roamed from city to city in search of employment “on the verge of starvation and crime.”<sup>166</sup>

This depression put pressure on both local poor boards and private charities and on the resources they could provide. The depression brought with it unemployment, scarcity of funds, and a lowering of the standard of living for most working-class citizens. In response, many left Germany, immigrating to other countries such as the United States in an effort to better their circumstances. This flux of people out of the country caused Chancellor Otto von Bismarck to worry as he felt that Germans who left would lose their national identity. Bismarck viewed this as sacred and he hoped that a new social insurance program would curb the effects and show the average German worker that the government cared about their needs and was willing to do what was necessary to meet them, all while keeping power in conservative political hands and staving off the support of workers to the growing Social Democratic Party (SPD).

Social insurance was first introduced in Kaiser Wilhelm I's *Royal Proclamation on Social Policy* in 1881. After the official announcement, Bismarck began fighting with the Reichstag on passing the laws. There were three parts to the proposed social insurance plans that were eventually passed in Germany: health insurance, accident insurance, and old age and disability insurance. As these reforms were implemented they transformed poor relief on both a municipal and national level. Yet, the Elberfeld System continued to flourish despite also bringing new challenges to the System's basic principles.

The first social insurance program passed by the Reichstag in 1883 was health insurance and it became operational in December of 1884. This piece of insurance covered those employed

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<sup>166</sup> Christoph Sachße und Florian Tennstedt, "Armenfürsorge, soziale Fürsorge, Sozialarbeit", 415.

in factories, mines, workshops, quarries, and transportation.<sup>167</sup> Not covered, initially, were those working as domestic servants or other non-wage workers like homeworkers. Therefore, its enrollment numbers were lower as compared to the other social insurance programs early on.<sup>168</sup> An important feature of all of the social insurance policies was that both the employer and the employee paid into the system. None of the services rendered by these policies were considered ‘handouts’ given by the government. Those insured were entitled to cash benefits and to medical care in cases of sickness. This included surgery, hospital treatment and supplies, and sick pay.<sup>169</sup> Initially, the health insurance policy covered only the insured worker, which left other family members, such as wives and children, without any form of medical care. In 1885, one year after implementation, the German population was 46.7 million and of that 4.7 million were insured against sickness.<sup>170</sup> By 1900, the population rose to 56 million and those insured raised to 10.2 million. The success of the health insurance program was not instant but once individuals were able to experience the benefits themselves, many German workers became insured.

A second social insurance policy proposed by Bismarck was an accident insurance law. Taking three drafts before it could pass the Reichstag, this legislation provided a way for workers to be compensated in the event that they were hurt on the job. Evolving from an earlier law that allowed employees who were hurt on the job to take it to the courts and make the employer pay for the cost of the damages done to the person, the court cases were largely ineffective and costly to the worker.<sup>171</sup> In the original proposition for this law, Bismarck wanted the German government to subsidize a portion of the fee in an effort to demonstrate to workers that the government

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<sup>167</sup> Frederic C. Howe, *Socialized Germany*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1916), 194.

<sup>168</sup> Steinmetz, *Regulating the Social*, 25.

<sup>169</sup> Howe, *Socialized Germany*, 194.

<sup>170</sup> Sulzbach, *German Experience with Social Insurance*, 13.

<sup>171</sup> Steinmetz, *Regulating the Social*, 26.

supported them in meeting their needs. Yet the Reichstag was vehemently against this measure, only passing it when Bismarck conceded and removed the policy. Accident insurance officially passed in 1884 only covering the same individuals that the health insurance policy covered until it later extended to other non-wage workers. In 1886, 3.7 million people were insured against accidents and in 1900, the number rose to 17.4 million. The employers were the sole contributor to the insurance fund and organized themselves “into a series of industry wide joint liability associations” in order to keep down the costs paid out to workers.<sup>172</sup>

The final social insurance policy put forward by Bismarck was an old age and disability insurance bill passed in 1889. Before this law was enacted, care for those who were elderly or disabled usually fell under the jurisdiction of family members or in their absence, local poor boards. For those families who had the responsibility, by law, to care for aging family members often placed an undue burden upon them, causing them to struggle to provide for themselves and their immediate family members. Then in time of severe economic crisis, it was largely impossible for the family members to take on the responsibility due to a lack of resources or because they could not be found in a society marked by high mobility of individuals searching for jobs. This new law provided for those who could no longer work due to old age or disability by giving them a type of pension. Similar to the health insurance program, employees had to pay into the system so that one day they could receive a portion of a salary to live on, although the amount of the pension was considered low. This meant that many pensioners still found themselves in need of support by local relief programs. Individuals could start receiving their pensions when they reached 70 years of age or if they became disabled and were no longer able to work. Unlike health

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<sup>172</sup> Steinmetz, *Regulating the Social*, 26.

and accident insurance, old age and disability insurance included all areas of workers from the beginning and the government subsidized part of the fees.

In this larger political and economic climate, the more traditional forms of poor relief, like the Elberfeld System, were now dealing with the added dynamic of social insurance. However, as can be seen in Table 2.3, large urban centers continued to adopt the Elberfeld System as its local poor relief plan even after social insurance was adopted. This is indicative of two things. First, social insurance legislation did not provide comprehensive protection for all conditions of poverty. As reformers came to realize, most became impoverished as a result of unemployment or underemployment, neither of which were covered in the social insurance legislation. Therefore, municipal relief remained the primary source of aid for most individuals. Second, only a relatively small number of workers found protection under the social insurance legislation, especially in its early years of introduction. Since various occupations were left out of being covered or those whose work was largely temporary meant they could not take advantage of the programs, they remained reliant on other forms of relief when they fell upon difficult times.

The conditions of rapid urbanization, economic swings, and new social insurance legislation to consider it became increasingly difficult for citizen volunteers with little specialized skills or training, while also pursuing their own vocational responsibilities, to manage the role of poor guardian. Therefore, as the Elberfeld System took hold far beyond its original boundaries, three modifications were made in its application changing one of its core features, the decentralization of decision making. First to change from the original structure was the district breakdown for each city. No longer was a neighborhood system used in which the guardians lived in close proximity to the poor facilitating individualized relationships to know their condition. Since cities began experiencing massive fluctuations of residents coming in and out in search of



jobs and segregated neighborhoods between rich and poor, the image of the poor guardian being the literal and metaphorical neighbor was untenable. Rather the city would still be broken down into districts, but poor guardian assignments were based upon their aptitude to help alleviate the needs of those requesting aid. The shift away from a neighborhood system and towards a technical criterion in assigning cases was a step away from decentralization. "By highlighting technical aspects in relation to territorial jurisdiction...the guardian's complete independence was curtailed in favor of the powers of the district overseer...who performed the classification."<sup>173</sup> A second change came through a shift in decisions made regarding benefits. No longer did poor guardians determine what or how much aid the petitioner needed. Rather this became the responsibility of the central administration. The responsibility of the guardian became depersonalized as they simply applied an individual for relief rather than suggesting what they needed. This too was a further step towards a centralization of poor relief at the expense of the independence of the guardian.

The final, and most important, shift in principles was the abandonment of pure voluntary service of poor guardians. This was replaced, in some cities, by employing individuals as poor guardians to do the work. This was a controversial decision by cities who made this shift and critics would question as to whether local government were really adhering to the Elberfeld System itself. However, in cities with large populations the volunteer structure and organization seemed untenable. The bureaucratic paper trail alone for each new case was often times so daunting for a volunteer guardian that they were uninclined to offer their services. There was also discussion as to whether or not untrained guardians were too liberal in their doling out of aid or perhaps a carelessness on the guardian's part to rid themselves of a case by quickly giving out relief and not

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<sup>173</sup> Christoph Sachße und Florian Tennstedt, "Armenfürsorge, soziale Fürsorge, Sozialarbeit," 415-416.

properly assessing the needs. This became a common critique in those locations where poor relief expenditures did not seem to decrease as quickly or steadily as one would have hoped. This too discouraged citizen volunteers who felt that their actions were scrupulously questioned and monitored, ironic since this was what guardians did to those persons in need of aid. While cities who altered the traditional Elberfeld System never fully abandoned honorary service of poor guardians, they embraced a hybrid of volunteers and paid officials. The paid officials typically managed those bureaucratic tasks like paperwork so as to “make it easier for volunteers to do the work, free them up for the care and support of the poor, and thus have a positive effect on their motivations.”<sup>174</sup>

Overall, the adverse effect of these alterations disconnected the guardians from those they aided and as a result became unable to understand the true causes of the poor’s condition. Consequently, as the Elberfeld System spread, and became more attractive to other cities, its malleable nature became part of its own undoing. The more centralized the decision making the less inclined individuals felt towards understanding their service as a role of citizenship. The greater reliance on paid guardians meant individuals did not have to feel responsible for the conditions of the poor and in turn caused them to misunderstand poverty’s root causes. This was the fear of individuals like Büsch and Voght back in Hamburg in the late eighteenth century who warned about the lack of accountability and the ease of scapegoating communal responsibilities when the middle- and upper-classes become uninvested and cutoff from the processes of poor relief. This fear had become reality as industrialization and urbanization took their hold on German society. The centralization of poor relief, like the centralization of other structures (government,

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<sup>174</sup> Christoph Sachße und Florian Tennstedt, "Armenfürsorge, soziale Fürsorge, Sozialarbeit," 416-417.

businesses, education) was largely a marker of modernity's progress but it fundamentally undid what reformers in the mid-nineteenth century had hoped the Elberfeld System would do.

Despite these shifts in practice and application, leading German social reformers continued to laud the Elberfeld System for what it represented and its tangible benefits. It is unsurprising that the System would catch the attention of English social reformers who were drawn to its principles given that they came from a nation in which centralization of poor relief had produced, in their minds, "the prevalent irresponsible haphazard provision of relief to the impoverished."<sup>175</sup> So while Germany became increasingly centralized in their relief efforts, both locally and federally through social insurance during industrialization's expanse, England, and eventually the United States, looked to Germany and the Elberfeld System as having the answer to solve their growing social problem through decentralization.

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<sup>175</sup> Robert Humpreys, *Poor Relief and Charity, 1869-1945: The London Charity Organization Society*, (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 1.



## Chapter Three: The Problem of Poverty: The Social Question and Transnational

### Reform in an Age of Crisis

The 1860s and 1870s marked a turning point for Germany, Great Britain, and the United States in politics, the economy, and society. Traditional welfare measures also experienced an altering as a result of the larger structural changes. The decades bore witness to the long-desired goal of German unification bringing a mixture of expanded economic ties through substantial industrialization and a restructuring of politics to find a balance between local, state, and national powers. In Great Britain the decades began reeling from a series of economic crises and political upheavals in the 1860s that undermined British industrial strength and threatened the political status quo of previous decades causing an expansion of voting rights and debates among the middle- and upper-classes on how to deal with growing problems of urbanization. For the United States the same years were marked by a brutal civil war, a crippling global depression, struggles with reconstructing, and plunging forward into the precipice of expansive industrialization that would usher in America's first nation-wide strike.

From the 1860s until the outbreak of World War I the three major industrial powers of Germany, Great Britain, and the United States experienced the pangs of modernity in ways that required them to learn from one another in order to solve their most pressing problems, chief among them the Social Question. Led by middle-class liberals in each nation, the answers they sought revolved around protecting the free-market economy that had allowed them to amass immense wealth, fight against feelings of moral and biological decline produced by fears of degeneration propagated by Social Darwinism, ensure their political voices were not drowned out by a seemingly ever increasing working-class who demanded expanded suffrage rights, and to stave off the reactionary or revolutionary solutions advocated by conservatives and socialists to

the right and left of them on the political spectrum. The Elberfeld System's undergirded ideology of aid, its successful application throughout Germany, and its malleable nature to other locations seemed to hold many of the answers middle-class liberals desperately needed. Active transnational interest in the Elberfeld System began in the late 1860s producing a web of intercultural transfers. Exploring the motivations of British and American social reformers produces a refashioning of how we can understand these decades and their reform movements as part of a larger transatlantic community dedicated to solving the Social Question.

### **The Crises of the 1860s and 1870s in Britain**

The problems for Britain began in the 1860s after a period of relative economic, social, and political stability in the 1850s. This preceding decade has been characterized as a "Golden Age" hallmarked by the Crystal Palace Exhibition in 1851, which helped to reinforce a sense of progress and optimism in the years that would follow.<sup>177</sup> For many in Britain this "Golden Age" was a welcome change from the political and social instability of the late 1840s. During the 1850s poverty seemed "so unobtrusive, so unproblematic, as hardly to qualify as a "social problem.""<sup>178</sup> Yet the "Golden Age" was not as auspicious for the working-class as many wanted to believe, rather it was yet another moment in which the limits of England's industrial growth were starting to make themselves known and would become clearly evident in the turbulent decades of the 1860s and 1870s.

Traditionally scholars asserted that the 1860s and 1870s were a "flat period" of British poor law development when compared to the 1830s and 1840s or with the latter period of the 1880s and 1890s. However, this assessment has undergone a revision and notable British poverty scholars

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<sup>177</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 70.

<sup>178</sup> Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion*, 70.

such as Gareth Stedman Jones, Gertrude Himmelfarb, E.P. Hennock, and M.E. Rose have asserted that the 1860s and 1870s were a pivotal moment in both Poor Law evolution and philanthropic work in England. For example, Stedman Jones posits that these decades were fundamental in shaping middle-class attitudes towards private charity. In a similar vein, E.P. Hennock asserts that the crises of the 1860s was the perfect impetus to argue for a sweeping restructuring of the Poor Law system. And M.E. Rose has argued that rather than viewing the 'new' Poor Law as the work of reformers in the 1830s it was actually a creation of the 1860s and 1870s.<sup>179</sup>

The series of shocks that undermined the Poor Law system in the 1860s and 1870s were unquestionably centered in London but would extend to affect all of England's industrial areas. The first signs of instability began in the winter of 1859-1860 when a series of riots broke out in St. George-in-the-East parish against the Anglo-Catholic Oxford Movement. While these riots were not directly linked to economic or political problems their presence in the impoverished East End of London began to set off the anxieties of middle- and upper-class Londoners who were concerned over the loss of law and order. These riots would return a year later in the winter of 1860-1861 when a trade depression hit that when combined with a severe winter season caused distress and riots over the cost of bread. In the East End of London the crisis was felt primarily by casual and seasonal trade workers who began to petition the local Poor Boards for relief. However, the distress was so widespread and the numbers of those needing relief were so unprecedented that the Poor Law system buckled under the weight and ceased giving out aid, causing even further unrest.

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<sup>179</sup> M.E. Rose, "The Crisis of Poor Relief in England" in *The Emergence of the Welfare State in Britain and Germany*, ed. Wolfgang Mommsen (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 52. See also Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian England*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 241-242. E.P. Hennock, "Poverty and Social Theory in England: The Experience of the 1880s," *Social History*, vol. 1 (1976), 67-91.

After the harsh winter of 1861 things did not improve for Britain as it became entangled with the American Civil War starting that spring. As a result of this American instability the English textile industry began to feel the effects. From 1861 to 1865 the area of Lancashire in the Northwest part of England near the industrial centers of Liverpool and Manchester experienced a cotton famine that increased the number of unemployed causing widespread distress to textile workers. The years just before war broke out were a boom in which more woven cotton was produced than ever before, but it also meant that it was more than could be sold thus depressing the price of these goods. Manufacturers had initially scaled back the production in late 1860 and into 1861 but then due to the outbreak of the American Civil War British textile manufacturers were cut off from raw cotton due to the Union blockading Confederate ports. Manufacturers in Lancashire responded with heavy layoffs resulting in a prolonged spike of unemployment and workers having little to fall back on to carry them through the years of war. In these conditions workers looked to local Poor Boards, and it is estimated that applications for relief rose some 300 percent as compared to normal years and at the famine's height close to 500,000 people or one-fourth of Britain's population were receiving aid.<sup>180</sup>

The immense pressure put on the Poor Law system in Lancashire resulted in frequent gaps in relief which encouraged new private charitable groups to raise funds and step-in to provide an alternative source of help. What was unique about those impoverished by the cotton famine as compared to the poor in London's East-End was their perceived 'deserving' nature. Middle- and upper-class observers noted that greater relief efforts, both public and private, were needed in Lancashire because those struggling were in their position not as a result of laziness or a rejection

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<sup>180</sup> M.E. Rose, "The Crisis of Poor Relief in England," 57. Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 234.



of self-help but because of transnational political and economic events that they could not control. The government tried to respond in new ways to this unprecedented economic stagnation by passing the Public Works Manufacturing Districts Act in 1864 that allowed for local governments to borrow money to fund public work projects and put those unemployed to work. Textile laborers were employed building public parks, revitalizing the sewer system which had not been updated since its medieval creation, and the construction of canals and roads. Despite the premise that those in Lancashire were more deserving of relief, neither the public poor law system or the new charity initiatives were effective in solving the calamity. This was the crux of the problem. It was not that industrial depression hit the area, but rather, it was its longevity that put a strain on the institutional forms of relief.

After the American Civil War ended in 1865 cotton imports resumed and brought the Lancashire crisis largely to an end, but structurally it demonstrated the inadequacies and weakness of British Poor Law practices but also taught valuable lessons. Poor guardians realized the inadequacy of holding strictly to the regulations of the Poor Laws. Historian Lynn Hollen Lees found, for example, that “guardians in Roachdale, Ashton-under-Lyne, and Oldham asked permission from the Central Poor Law Board in 1862 to dispense with a labor test” and while the request was refused the guardians in Oldham approved the relief “anyway and voted to defy the board’s instructions.”<sup>181</sup> The flexibility of guardians proved essential in meeting relief demands and the response by private charities to supplement the aid provided by the state showed the limits to the rule of “less-eligibility.” Ultimately, “the famine taught the lesson that prevention of pauperism required early and creative intervention, rather than a stint in the workhouse, and it cast

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<sup>181</sup> Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers*, 236.

doubt on the automatic connection between destitution and criminality often made by middle-class writers.”<sup>182</sup>

Parliament initiated an investigation into the Poor Law System which provided the impetus for an administrative reorganization when in 1865 Parliament passed the Union Chargeability Act. This legislation altered the local relief efforts from independent parishes into a union of parishes and “the union and not the parish became the area of Poor Law finance and settlement, thus enabling it to develop into a real administrative community instead of a loose amalgamation of quarrelling member states.”<sup>183</sup> Within two years the Poor Law Board was a permanent fixture of the British state allowing it to become a more active institution determining potential problems within the system and encouraging discussions on issues like vagrancy or nutrition and healthcare within the workhouse so as to implement new practices to reduce the prevalence of these problems. In 1871 the Poor Law Board was renamed to the Local Government Board, reflecting its permanence and connection to governmental functions.

Social problems and politics merged in the mid-1860s when disaffected urban workers called for reform through the avenue of suffrage expansion. Organizations like the Reform League, formed in February 1865 and supported largely by craftsmen, began the call for household suffrage, or the ability for adult male heads of family to vote, and hosted a series of demonstrations throughout the city. In the summer of 1866, a rally was organized by the Reform League to take place at Hyde Park. When word circulated that the Home Secretary Spencer Horatio Walpole banned the meeting, supporters of the Reform League pledged to hold the meeting regardless. When they marched to Hyde Park finding it locked and protected by police an estimated 200,000

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<sup>182</sup> Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers*, 237-238.

<sup>183</sup> M.E. Rose, “The Crisis of Poor Relief in England,” 59. See also Maurice Caplan, “The New Poor Law and the Struggle for Union Chargeability” in *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (1978), pp. 267-300.

people tore down the park's railings and set off a multi-day period of rioting, demonstrations, and altercations with police. This event, becoming known as the "Hyde Park Railings Affair," launched the calls for suffrage reform to a "major political threat" and escalated the already anxious feelings held by the wealthy upper and middle-classes.<sup>184</sup> This was followed by a difficult winter in 1866-1867 exacerbated by "the combination of the trade depression, the collapse of the Thames shipbuilding industry, the cholera epidemic, the bad harvest, and the exceptionally severe weather conditions" leaving all elements of London society on edge as to what could possibly come next. After a series of bread riots broke out in East London in early 1867 and unemployment reached unthinkable levels another demonstration took place in Hyde Park in May 1867, this time with approximately 100,000 people. Those in power were at a loss of how to respond to the seemingly never-ending series of crises and moved forward with passing the Reform Bill of 1867, which expanded suffrage laws to now include urban male workers. The British electorate doubled with the bill's passing but stopped short of universal male suffrage. In an effort to put an end to the political instability "Parliament hastened to pass a sweeping Reform Bill which would forestall the dangers of an incipient alliance between the casual 'residuum' and the 'respectable working class.'"<sup>185</sup>

Despite the Parliamentary efforts to reorganize and better facilitate the Poor Law System through the passing of the Union Chargeability Act or its efforts to stave off political instability through the passing of the Reform Bill social problems continued to plague British society, especially within London. More specifically, the East End of London was the centerpiece for urban anxieties as it seemed to be the place which embodied a confluence of problems. Gareth Stedman

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<sup>184</sup> Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, 241.

<sup>185</sup> Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, 242.

Jones attributes these problems to a changing industrial economy that saw the decline of staple industries and the rise of unskilled jobs filled by laborers who neither possessed or needed training to produce various goods.<sup>186</sup> With the invention of new machinery like the sewing machine to make textiles, manufacturers no longer relied on skilled labor. Furthermore, the development of factory work in more rural areas meant a decline in demand for goods produced in major urban centers like London. This was then exacerbated by the process known as “sweating,” a decentralization tactic adopted by manufacturers to reduce their overhead to a minimum by cutting the work done in a shop or factory and instead put it in the home. The result was a significant cut in wages and rent that manufactures had to pay but simultaneously meant a loss of income and the assurance for steady work by laborers.

Additionally, from 1866 to 1868 the Thames ship-building industry entered a significant decline after experiencing unparalleled growth in the first half of the decade. In the boom period the ship-building companies hired large numbers of workers and benefited from steady and high wages. This boom was built largely on speculative assurances and when one ship-building firm went under many more followed in its wake. It was estimated that more than thirty thousand people, laid off from their jobs, in the East London area of Poplar were in need of aid. Unemployment remained a constant problem well into the 1870s as other industries, such as railways and construction experienced a similar decline. As if things could not get worse a bad wheat harvest in 1866 drove up the price of the crop, making it difficult for those struggling to get by to purchase bread. With issues of overcrowding in tenement buildings which encouraged the buildup of filth and spread disease a cholera epidemic broke out in the fall of 1866 killing almost

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<sup>186</sup> Stedman Joes, *Outcast London*, 243-244.

four thousand people in the East End alone.<sup>187</sup> Compounded by a consternation over the radicalization of the working class, especially with their newly gained political power, and fears of rampant crime fostered by the impecuniousness of those in the East End made the upper and middle-classes feel overwhelmed by social problems that no legislation seemed able to fix.

The response by the British upper- and middle-classes to the turbulent social and economic problems of the 1860s demonstrated that they recognized the limits of how relief was managed under the Poor Law with the workhouse test. Lynn Hollen Lees posits the New Poor Law was a solution primarily “to rural poverty and seasonal underemployment” and was not formulated to manage “an urbanized, mobile labor force and with cyclical changes in employment, rapid shifts in technology, and increasingly powerful and organized groups of trade unionists.”<sup>188</sup> Critics lamented that in times of distress the Poor Law encouraged individuals to abandon the principles of self-help. British civil servant Charles Trevelyan (1807-1886), who had already made a name for himself as assistant secretary to the Treasury in administering the relief policies in Ireland during the famine from 1845-1847, wrote about in 1870 that the Poor Law encouraged destitution

by making it the sole qualification for obtaining the benefits...and by requiring that every able-bodied applicant for relief shall break up his home and workshop and go into the union house [workhouse] with his family. The Poor Law makes no distinction between the honest industrious labourer who is suffering temporary distress from sickness or want of employment, and the habitual idler. It grievously offends against two divine institutions which lie at the foundation of human society—the law which prescribes that man shall live by labour, and that which has set men in families with all their supporting and refining influences...the Poor Law has induced among our working people a general carelessness even as regards *their own future*.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, 102-103.

<sup>188</sup> Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers*, 231.

<sup>189</sup> Charles E. Trevelyan, *Seven articles on London pauperism and its relations with the labour market: published in 'The Parochial critic and weekly record of metropolitan organisations' in July and August, 1870*, (London: Bell & Daldy, 1870), 11.

The initial reaction of upper- and middle-class Londoners to the crises of the 1860s was to invest and operate private charities to supplement the operations of the Poor Law Board. Money came flooding in from all over London to support the newly formed charities. Estimates place the annual amount given to private charities by the end of the 1860s to be around seven million pounds, which was about the same as what the British government spent on its navy.<sup>190</sup> These charitable efforts, however, were largely unorganized and the work of individuals who operated without coordinating with public relief. Supporters of these private initiatives became convinced that the sheer number of impoverished concentrated largely in one area meant that whatever aid or oversight practiced by the Poor Law Board was cruel and inadequate. Motivated to end such treatment and adequately meet the needs of those seeking aid, groups like one from the West End of London who belonged to a club made up of “scions of the landed gentry” organized the “Society for the Relief of Distress,” and in a matter of three weeks they had given out relief equaling more than three thousand pounds. Examples like this were not infrequent, nor was it only cash that charities raised to meet the seemingly unsolvable social ill. “Soup kitchens were opened, coal and blankets were distributed, relief was given in exchange for ‘nominal’ work in the stoneyard, free breakfasts were offered in return for attendance at prayer meetings.”<sup>191</sup>

By the end of the 1860s, the frenzy of charitable activity produced as a result of the crisis began to have vocal critics. According to them, the desire to amend the Poor Law by extensive giving to private charities produced its own set of problems. Again, Charles Trevelyan spoke to this issue: “Natural and Christian feeling must have a vent; and, under this powerful influence, the great wealth of London has been offered as a prey to its enormous population through the medium

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<sup>190</sup> Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, 244.

<sup>191</sup> Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, 245-246.

of innumerable charitable societies and individuals, without any attempt at territorial or individual apportionment. The consequence has been the growth of a mendicant system such as the world never before saw, the prizes of which are for the accomplished rogues, while the honest industrious poor are left to the tender mercies of the Poor Law.”<sup>192</sup> The detractors of the charitable giving, while recognizing that it might have been done out of Christian charity and the desire to do good, argued that ultimately these actions “demoralized” the poor.

Blame was not placed solely on the poor, though they did hold a modicum of responsibility in the eyes of the critics. Rather blame was placed in the hands of the indiscriminate almsgiver and the means by which relief was ill-managed in London’s most impoverished areas. Regardless of the good intention, reformers argued that the reason why the undiscerning giving and demoralization of the poor could flourish was directly linked to the physical gap between London’s rich and poor. No longer were those who were giving to charities living in the communities with those who were in need. Individuals were cutoff from living with the reality of the situation and in an attempt to help fix the problem that they heard and read extensively about they threw money at the problem. For example, Charles Bertie Puleine Bosanquet (1834-1905) a founder of London’s Charity Organization Society, lamented that “one of the greatest evils of London at present is that rich and poor have very little knowledge of each other. Even in those parts where rich and poor are living near each other, a respectable poor person may die or sink into destitution for want of a little timely help or advice, which it would be a pleasure to many a richer neighbour to give.”<sup>193</sup> As Stedman Jones illustrates, the phenomenon of separation between rich and poor was not a new development and had in fact been developing since the beginning of the industrial revolution in all

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<sup>192</sup> Trevelyan, *Seven articles on London pauperism*, 12.

<sup>193</sup> Charles B. P. Bosanquet, *London: Some Accounts of its Growth, Charitable Agencies, and Wants*, (1868) v-vi.

manufacturing areas in England. By the end of the 1860s the separation between classes within London was causing the “dangerous social situation” that was “threaten[ing] upper-class London.”<sup>194</sup>

There in England, and London in particular, the gulf between classes produced a set of perceived “evils” within society that needed to be solved quickly before further deterioration. One evil was the decay of local administration of the Poor Law within areas like the East End. As the wealthy fled to better parts of the city or left the city all together what remained was a group of “small property owners, contractors, and tradesmen” whose job it now was to fill the roles on local boards but these “plebian elements” were not well suited for these roles like the “natural local governing class” had been and it therefore “had produced a deleterious effect upon the moral character of East London.”<sup>195</sup>

A second evil was an imbalance between the Poor Law and private charity. In its original fashioning the Poor Law dictated that each community or union was responsible for the poor, and their relief, within their boundaries. This responsibility meant both in the poor law rate charged via taxes and the operational oversight of the poor law board and workhouse. When rich and poor lived closer together this balance was maintained and by extension an awareness of the conditions for impoverishment. As the wealthy fled not only did their participation in these services stop so too did their monetary contributions to the local poor board. This mean that those unions who were in the greatest need had the highest poor rate but were largely unable to pay it whereas those more affluent unions payed a lower rate due to lower demand. The result was a repeated breakdown of the Poor Law system in the East End, especially during a time of peak crisis such as the mid-1860s.

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<sup>194</sup> Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, 247.

<sup>195</sup> Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, 248.



Therefore, for a time the solution was for the richer parts of the city to send money via charities hence the ability of groups like the “Society for the Relief of Distress” to raise massive funds in a matter of weeks. For critics this was “regarded as a form of guilt money by the West End in default of its legal obligations.”<sup>196</sup> This particular evil was largely solved when in 1867 Parliament passed the Metropolitan Poor Act, which merged all of poor law unions in the city into one singular union and defrayed “the entire cost” for its operation “out of [a] common fund to be levied *pro rata* over the metropolis.” As the *London Times* reported, the Act was “in every respect a great gain to the metropolis, and is one of the most important of the improvements for the relief of the sick poor suggested and brought about...”<sup>197</sup> The Act also helped to calm some of the fears by producing a common Poor Law Board which would be made up of individuals throughout the city. It was hoped that this institution would bring back men of notable distinction to positions of influence within the Poor Law administration instead of those “plebian elements.”

The third, and considered most dire, evil produced by the separation of rich and poor within London was the “demoralization” of the working class. The demoralization was of utmost concern because it seemed to destroy the characteristics of self-help and thriftiness needed for the flourishing of an industrial labor force. What was feared was the production, as a result of the rampant indiscriminate almsgiver and the massive influx of funds via private charity into areas like the East End, of a group of “clever paupers” who took advantage of the system. Those who used the chaos to intentionally not work and live from handout to handout. Critics began to fixate on these devious paupers as those who could earn more from receiving aid than by working. While reformers recognized that these actions did not represent the whole of those in need of aid and

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<sup>196</sup> Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, 250.

<sup>197</sup> “Metropolitan Poor Act” in *The London Times*, (*London, England*), Friday, Sep 13, 1867; pg. 7; Issue 25915.

most of the petitions for relief were genuine, the presence of these derelict paupers infected the city like a disease, encouraging other, more honest poor to take up those same actions. British surgeon and writer Joshua Harrison Stallard wrote: “A Poor Law, to be economically sound, is bound to recognise this personal responsibility in full. Beyond this point it is nothing but an organized system of benevolence to assist the poor in exceptional distress, and can never be permitted to become a source of legal assistance, upon which they may habitually depend. It is the embodiment of that judicious and restrained benevolence which, whilst relieving the shortcomings of a man’s responsibility, teaches him to help himself according to his opportunity and power, even at the expense of suffering. Under these circumstances alone, it prevents the growth of the spirit of pauperism, which, once implanted is beyond a cure. Pauperism, therefore, is a moral evil, only to be prevented by education, industrial training, and the conditions of morality and health.”<sup>198</sup>

Therefore action was needed to protect the honest poor from being drawn into the vice of pauperism and degrading the British working class. An investigation of London’s East End by British writer Thomas Archer found, “So intimately, indeed are the paupers, the poor tenants of the “bad neighbourhoods,” and the criminals associated, that the recognition of their duties by the gentlemen who should be guardians of the poor would do much to mitigate the incalculable evils brought about by foul dwellings and undrained hovels, where poverty weds crime, and brings forth fruit that ripens for the gallows.”<sup>199</sup>

What is interesting about the perceived social problems held by members of the upper- and middle-classes that were plaguing British, and more specifically London, society in the second

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<sup>198</sup> Joshua Harrison Stallard, *Pauperism, Charity, & Poor Laws: Being an Inquiry Into the Present State of the Poorer Classes in the Metropolis, the Resources and Effects of Charity, and the Influence of the Poor-law System of Relief with Suggestions for an Improved Administration, Volume 1*, (London: Longmans, Green and Dyer, 1868), 4.

<sup>199</sup> Thomas Archer, *The Pauper, the Thief, and the Convict: Sketches of Some of their Homes, Haunts, and habits*, (London, 1865), 6.

half of the nineteenth century was that it did not consistently reflect reality. Despite some setbacks, the English economy thrived from 1850 to 1873. While there had been real consequences to the economic depression caused by the American Civil War and there were real shifts to the industrial economy relating to jobs and production, the life of most of the working-class substantially improved and would continue to do so through the outbreak of World War I. When comparing numbers, there was a steady increase in working-class incomes from the 1840s onward and substantially so after 1880. This increase brought an improved standard of living for both skilled and unskilled workers alike. With better wages workers began to spend more money on goods beyond those for basic survival. Likewise, as technology increased and impacted production processes this made consumer goods cheaper and more accessible for the working-class. After 1871 there began a steady decline in the family size going from an average size of six persons per family to three by the turn of the century.<sup>200</sup> This meant fewer people to feed and care for and reduced the burden on working class families. Even during the years of economic contraction as a result of the Panic of 1873 the cost of living decreased as cheap food came flooding into British markets helping to reduce the costs for such goods for all consumers.<sup>201</sup>

As the economy steadily grew many city officials began to take the returns of the strong economic conditions to invest them into their communities. In 1870 Parliament passed the Education Act which solidified the efforts to make free compulsory education available for all children. Parliament had already been spending close to one million pounds annually on education, but this act expanded its efforts nationwide. Then public health initiatives passed in 1872 and 1875 increased the number of municipal medical officers and reworked outdated and ineffective sewage

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<sup>200</sup> E.A. Wrigley, *Population and History*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), 197.

<sup>201</sup> Hollen Lees, *Solidarities of Strangers*, 239.

drainage systems while also increasing access to clean water. These actions in turn helped reduce the number of victims of disease like cholera, typhus, and tuberculosis particularly in heavily urbanized areas. One of the reasons for the investment into communities on the part of government initiatives was the expanded suffrage bill passed in 1867. In the years following its enactment working men began to run for, and fill, office seats from the House of Commons to local town council and local government board positions. Their presence in these roles inevitably made politics and policy reflect their concerns and aspirations for what government intervention could do. Yet at the same time poverty did not disappear. For those jobs which were the lowest paid or those in which seasonal layoffs were frequent, poverty was still a real issue.

There must be, therefore, a reconciliation between the anxious feelings held by the upper- and middle-classes and their frantic writings on the social problems with the reality that things had been and would continue to improve for Britain's working-classes in the second half of the nineteenth century. One of the driving impetuses for these feeling was the loss of influence and control held by members of the upper- and middle-classes. In the aftermath of the Reform Bill of 1867 workers were now a significant voting bloc of British politics and the target for liberal and conservative political parties along with new parties catering specifically to the needs of workers. As it now became an important endeavor to appeal to these working-class votes, the major parties tended to speak to, if not embrace, workers' issues. Furthermore, now members of the working class could run for and hold political office, displacing the more conservative landed gentry or the middle-class liberal. Just as critics had complained about areas of London municipal government being left to the 'plebian' elements as a root cause for the degradation in the running of the Poor Law so too did these disapprovals extend towards wage laborers filling the political roles of the country. By advocating for a reform to the Poor Laws that valorized the lifestyle and values of

hard work and thriftiness of the bourgeoisie while at the same time connecting them more directly with the care of the poor seemed to be the solution they were looking for. Through these desires the Charity Organisation Society (COS) came about, being founded in London in 1869. Their approach to poor relief, led by members of the upper- and middle-classes would come alongside the legal framework of the Poor Law to coordinate the charitable efforts in the city so that there was little overlap and to reduce the prevalence of the indiscriminate almsgiver which was encouraging the demoralization of the poor within the city. As the COS pursued these goals, the best example they utilized was that of the Elberfeld System in Germany which operated on an individualized knowledge of the poor by linking relief officials to those who were in need.

### **The Transatlantic Great Depression**

The Panic of 1873 was the world's first global economic downturn and demonstrated the connectivity and vulnerability of national markets to larger global events. A trend of boom and bust cycles would become emblematic of global capitalism interpreted as the market's natural 'corrective' measure to scale back speculative buying or investment. The Panic was triggered by a confluence of factors on both sides of the Atlantic relating to the consequences of military conflicts in the 1860s, the over-speculation of railroad constructions, and the demonetization of silver in Europe and the U.S. Given this combination of factors it is difficult to pinpoint where the Panic began, but it would demonstrate its strength in how many economies, business sectors, and individuals it would touch.

For Germany, the period between 1850 and 1873, often referred to as the *Gründerzeit*, was a time of substantial economic growth, with the economy growing at about 2.5 per cent a year.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> David Blackbourn, *History of Germany 1780-1918: The Long Nineteenth Century*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 135.

Concentrated in the sectors of industry like coal, iron, and steel, and railway construction at the heart of it all, Germany was on pace to become the world's newest leading industrial power. When German unification was achieved in 1871, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck embraced a liberalized economic policy, which had been the hope for many in their support for unification, and included "a uniform currency, weights and measures and patents, and a common legal framework for commercial operations."<sup>203</sup> As a result, "these developments fostered a climate of confidence and a willingness to invest that reached its apogee" in the years after German unification.<sup>204</sup>

The economic boom came to a halt at the first sign of economic downturn on May 9, 1873 through the crashing of the Vienna stock market. The stock market had begun a substantial speculative boom in 1869 when monies were invested into new joint-stock companies or new businesses in the trade and industry sectors. This was helped by the substantial French indemnity of five billion francs paid to Germany as determined by the Treaty of Frankfurt at the end of the Franco-Prussian War. More money was invested in the three years between 1869 and 1873 than had been from 1851-1870 combined.<sup>205</sup> Vienna proved a thriving place to invest in the early 1870s as the Austro-Hungarian economy experienced its own *Gründerzeit* and bore witness to the forging of new firms and an expansive construction project in Vienna to build the Ringstrasse boulevard and in preparation for the city's hosting of the World Exposition in 1873. There was also substantial investment into the building of railroad networks throughout the region in order to meet the demand for agricultural goods, specifically wheat. Wheat connected Vienna and Chicago in that Austria-Hungary had been exporting its wheat to Britain for quite some time and had invested heavily in railroad networks in order to ease the movement of the raw material to its purchasers,

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<sup>203</sup> Blackbourn, *History of Germany 1780-1918*, 141.

<sup>204</sup> Blackbourn, *History of Germany 1780-1918*, 141.

<sup>205</sup> Blackbourn, *History of Germany 1780-1918*, 144.

funded by speculation in a later payoff once the crop was sold. Yet by the early 1870s the wheat market was moving away from Austria-Hungary and towards North America after investments into mechanized agriculture in the West took off. Wheat was now cheaper from the U.S. than from Austria-Hungary which threatened the solvency of Austrian banks.<sup>206</sup>

Investment into the new firms and banks was based largely on speculation and when prices began to fall on ‘Black Friday’ in May a panic ensued with the selling of stocks in which companies did not have the securities to pay. This was worsened when the National Bank in Vienna did not have the reserves to cover its losses. The sell-off continued for two more days until the exchange was closed on May 10 and remained closed for three days. Once the stock market reopened it seemed as though the damage was concentrated between Vienna and Berlin. The ensuing months, however, proved the opposite and the financial crisis was only just beginning. Many American’s took little notice of the stock market crash in Vienna, but they did note how the Bank of England responded as it raised its discount rates in a precautionary measure to restrict “the reckless borrowing that had brought Austria to its knees.”<sup>207</sup> This caused interest rates to rise, and with a constricted global money supply American and European investors began to get nervous about their debts and the economic stability to pay them off.

Another contributing factor to the Panic of 1873 was the transatlantic step towards demonetization of silver which tightened the global monetary supply. Germany began this process in 1871 in which the new Reich government sought to displace the use of silver coins in all transactions in an effort to introduce the new gold mark as the official currency of the new nation and strengthening its value on the global market. This process culminated in the summer of 1873

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<sup>206</sup> Richard White, *The Republic for Which it Stands*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 260-261.

<sup>207</sup> White, *The Republic for Which it Stands*, 261.

just as the United States was in its own transition. In January 1873 Congress passed the Coinage Act to stabilize America's economy after the use of greenbacks to pay for the Civil War, the influx of silver mining in the West, and the transition of European economies away from the metal, all which seemed to be driving down the amount of gold in circulation. The Act ended silver's ability to be a legal standard of currency. The combined effort of Europe and the United States to move away from silver encouraged a flood of the market with the specie thus depressing its price. Bankers, both in American and Europe, did not like this move as it threatened the value of their holdings. They, in turn, moved towards offloading their silver supplies for more gold.<sup>208</sup>

The demonetization of silver had an additional repercussion in that it restricted the amount of capital available for investors, which would hit directly at the most prevalent form of investment at the time, railroads. American railroad investment was a common fund for American and Europeans who viewed the process of moving westward as a never-ending building project bringing goods, people, and resources to new areas of the nation. However, when things began their downward spiral after the Coinage Act and then the Vienna stock market crash, many European investors started to pull their money out of railroad firms so as to protect their funds but as Richard White finds, "many bonds [were] sold at discount, leaving the railroads to repay a debt much larger than the money they received."<sup>209</sup> As railroad companies went under, the banks that financed them carried the loss the hardest. Bankers such as Jay Cooke & Company and the Northern Pacific Railroad looked for help from other sources and after swindling millions of dollars from the Freedman's Bank, which held deposits from former slaves who were trying to save money to buy land, the scheme was for naught and Cooke closed the doors of his bank in

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<sup>208</sup> White, *The Republic for Which it Stands*, 263.

<sup>209</sup> White, *The Republic for Which it Stands*, 261.



September 1873. As other branches and banks followed suit in the coming days the New York stock exchange experienced its own crash, culminating the transnational depression begun months earlier in Vienna.

The effects of the depression were felt throughout western Europe and the United States almost immediately. As businesses failed and banks closed, workers bore the brunt of this decline as there was a loss in wages and a large number of layoffs. In Germany these layoffs came in the mining, iron, and steel industries. The Saarland region, for example, which was a thriving area in the previous decades, saw production numbers drop and significant unemployment.<sup>210</sup> German agriculture was also affected as “prices for primary produce fell as new land was opened up, and lower transportation costs brought an influx of cheap grain, meat and other produce from Europe and overseas.”<sup>211</sup> The problems experienced in Germany, and throughout Europe, were exacerbated by similar consequences in the United States. While the American press had initially labeled the Panic as a railroad depression, which was not inaccurate as about half of the railroad companies had gone under by 1876, they eventually began to see the larger structural effects in other sectors. Iron industries, connected to railroad demand, suffered along with farmers who responded to falling prices with overproduction of resources which did nothing but further saturate the market and drive down prices.

American industrial laborers, similar to their German counterparts, were particularly struck by the weight of the economic depression. One of the most important results of the Panic of 1873 was that it introduced widespread and long-lasting unemployment to the United States. Up until this point, unemployment was an unknown entity given that actual periods of sustained

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<sup>210</sup> Blackbourn, *History of Germany 1780-1918*, 144; Hans Horch, *Der Wandel der Gesellschafts- und Herrschaftsstrukturen in der Saarregion während der Industrialisierung*, (St Ingbert, 1985), 225.

<sup>211</sup> Blackbourn, *History of Germany 1780-1918*, 144.

unemployment were rare in the U.S. The notion that there were laborers who actively sought employment and found none was a new phenomenon. Historian Alexander Keyssar in his investigation of unemployment in Massachusetts from the 1870s to the 1920s argues that pervasive unemployment created a reserve army of labor and that this was key in the making of the working-class in America. He calls this period, at the onset of the Panic, the “era of uncertainty,” in which unemployment and the threat of unemployment affected workers of all levels and skills which in turn directly influenced the working class culture and life.<sup>212</sup> Estimates place the unemployment rate in the years following the Panic around fifteen percent in 1878 and the number increased to thirty percent for those who spent more than a hundred days of the year without employment.<sup>213</sup> In New York City alone unemployment estimates reached twenty-five percent in the first winter after the September stock-market crash. Many men who failed to find jobs in their cities of residence began wandering around the U.S. in search of employment being labeled ‘tramps’ meaning those “with no visible means of support.”<sup>214</sup> These wandering unemployed workers epitomized the consequences of global economic instability. This new phenomenon was not lost on Americans who realized they were witnessing something new within their borders but also something that reminded them of what was prevalent in Europe. As American poet Walt Whitman lamented “If the United States, like the countries of the Old World, are also to grow vast crops of poor, desperate, dissatisfied, nomadic, miserably-waged populations such as we seen looming upon us of late years – steadily, even if slowly, eating into us like a cancer of lungs or stomach –

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<sup>212</sup> Alexander Keyssar, *Out of Work: The First Century of Unemployment in Massachusetts*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 37.

<sup>213</sup> White, *The Republic For Which it Stands*, 269; Keyssar, *Out of Work*, 37, 50-52, 62-69.

<sup>214</sup> White, *The Republic For Which it Stands*, 270.

then our republican experiment, notwithstanding all its surface successes, is at heart an unhealthy failure.”<sup>215</sup>

What the Panic of 1873 and the subsequent years would demonstrate was that while industrialization offered great promise of social and economic progress on the surface level, its control by aggregated wealth was an alarming development that if left unchecked would lead to greater pauperism and degradation of the working-class. In the years following the Panic, consistent work was not the norm for most industrial workers, and they found themselves unemployed just as often or more so than when they had dependable work. An article published in the *Labor Leader* addressed this lack of job security stating “no faithfulness, no skill, no experience can protect him [the worker] against the danger of being cast adrift with his family at the next shift of the market. He is part of the grist in the great mill of demand and supply, and when his time comes it remorselessly crushes him between its iron rollers.”<sup>216</sup> The lack of job security provided an avenue for workers to share and identify with their common experiences creating a more unified working class that fostered co-dependency and the need to combat the effects of unemployment, and in turn poverty, among their kind.

As individuals sought to find ways to survive the prolonged periods of unemployment, they explored what options they had available. Any meager savings were used quickly, and the next resort was to look to family members, who often found themselves in the same position and unable to help. The same public and private relief institutions were still functioning throughout this period, but the growing numbers of those unemployed were too much for them to handle and what they received from these institutions was paltry. The relief structure in the U.S. at this time was not

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<sup>215</sup> “The Tramp and Strike Question: Part of a Lecture proposed, (never deliver’d),” in Walt Whitman, *Complete Prose Works*, (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1897), 330 as cited in White, *The Republic For Which it Stands*, 271.

<sup>216</sup> Keyssar, *Out of Work*, 76.

adept to dealing with massive numbers of deserving poor and they frequently fell back on older designations when providing aid. The discrimination made workers petition for relief “only when desperate” and once being evaluated as worthy would receive “a pittance.”<sup>217</sup>

What the economic and political crises of the 1860s and the Panic of 1873 represent was a unique historical moment in which nations were experiencing, for the first time, the pangs of global capitalism. This demonstrated that investment into one market or changes in one sector were not immune to larger structural reverberations. Scholars have debated the role that the Panic of 1873 has had on larger political developments. In German historiography, for example, it became another avenue in which to make sense of the coming political disaster of National Socialism. Hans Rosenberg’s *Grosse Depression und Bismarckzeit* (1967), for instance, had enormous influence in arguing that the *Gründerkrise* was a crucial “founding period” of Modern German history.<sup>218</sup> Other scholars such as Geoff Eley, however, have revised this assertion scaling back its larger influence on future political developments.<sup>219</sup> Interestingly, as German scholars have moved away from the structural causality of economic changes onto political developments American scholars have begun to see this as historically beneficial.<sup>220</sup> There have also been debates on the severity and length of the depression, questioning whether or not its designation as a ‘great’ depression is entirely suited. These historiographical debates, however, largely miss how these economic crises produced an immediate and long-lasting transnational dialogue centered around

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<sup>217</sup> White, *The Republic for Which it Stands*, 270; Keyssar, *Out of Work*, 143-66.

<sup>218</sup> Hans Rosenberg, *Grosse Depression und Bismarckzeit: Wirtschaftsablauf, Gesellschaft und Politik in Mitteleuropa*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967).

<sup>219</sup> Geoff Eley, *From Unification to Nazism: Reinterpreting the German Past*, (Winchester, Mass: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 23-41.

<sup>220</sup> See Nicholas Barreyre, “The Politics of Economic Crises: The Panic of 1873, the End of Reconstruction, and the Realignment of American Politics,” *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 10, No. 4, (October 2011): 403-423 also Richard White, *The Republic for Which it Stands*.

the problems of industrial society amongst the three major industrial powers of the day. What is less important about the Panic of 1873 and its long-term political developments is instead how it affected solutions to the problems which it created. The late 1860s and early 1870s brought the Social Question to a new heightened awareness. As reformers saw how global economic contractions could produce global consequences, they began to look outside of themselves for ways to better manage the uncertainty of laissez-faire capitalism while protecting it at the same time. Questions about urbanization, class conflict, and poverty were central to the dialogue produced as a result of the Panic of 1873.

The 1870s marked such a pivotal moment for liberals in Europe and the United States because it forced them to reconcile the benefits of laissez-faire capitalism with its more sinister consequences. It also became an important moment in that it awakened a more visible and vocal working-class movement. Class solidarity increased as a result of industrial growth and political expansion, the growing attraction of ideologies like Marxism, and workers recognizing their own unique interests. In all three nations this worker's movement took active steps towards making their issues and demands clear to those in power. In England, Parliament passed the Trade Union Act 1871 which decriminalized trade unions within the United Kingdom for the first time. This act combined with expanded suffrage to urban male workers in 1867 meant the Labour Party held greater sway in national politics than ever before. In Germany, the Social Democratic Workers' Party (*Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands*) was formed in 1869 and would merge in the mid-1870s with the General German Workers' Association (*Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein*) forming the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany (*Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands*). This political group of workers would be the target of Chancellor Bismarck in the series of Anti-Socialist Laws started in 1878 in an effort to halt the spread of Socialist principles

throughout Germany. Even in the United States, the 1870s saw unions develop, based on craft lines, skilled trades, and even the emergence of national ones like the Knights of Labor (1869), whose membership and prominence rose after the Panic, attempted to stabilize and improve working and living conditions of laborers.

The presence of these groups and the threat they posed to liberal capitalism was not a figment of reformer's imaginations. All they had to do was look around in the urban city and see the growing problems of urbanization and poor labor conditions to realize how they produced a volatile mix of severe class discontent. Furthermore, the threat of social unrest and class divisions were not a problem of one industrial nation but rather, by the 1870s, a collective issue in all three major industrial powers. Therefore, as a result of the global economic depression set off in 1873 social reformers began to categorically rethink the methods which governed public and private poor relief. Reformers were drawn to ideas that fundamentally protected the liberal-capitalist status-quo while also saving it from its, now, inherent and visible problems. As each nation struggled to come to terms with this change they began to learn and investigate solutions from one another that could solve their same problems. The reformist impulse reshaped how the middle-class understood and sought to solve the problem of poverty.

### **Social Darwinism and Fears of Degeneration**

The reform groups dominating social politics from the 1870s until the outbreak of World War I were drawn to scientific and rational solutions to their social challenges. Reformers were convinced that if technological, scientific, and rational progress had been able to produce such wealth and prosperity for the world then it would also hold the solutions for fixing the problems it had created. The enlightened nature of the Elberfeld System is what drew transatlantic reformers to Germany in order to seek out ways they could model the System back in their own countries.

There was a fundamental agreement amongst them that poverty had changed by the late nineteenth century and so charity must change with it. In an 1886 speech given by an early adherent to the Charity Organization movement in New York the recognition of this shift was central: “The Old Charity got along passably in this country so long as the problems were so very simple, when there was no large cities, few foreign poor, few ignorant, no professional pauper class. But it is the New Charity along which can meet the demands of the day and the situation. By eminence, it is alone the New Charity which can meet the demands of a vast city, with its unspeakable disparity of station and means, with its temptations, its perils, its exultations and agonies and enmities.”<sup>221</sup>

The anxieties held by the upper- and middle-class regarding the effects of an urban-industrial society articulated themselves within a rhetoric of degeneration. This was aided in large part to the publication in 1859 of Charles Darwin’s (1809-1882) work *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* which asserted the theory of organic evolution claiming that plants and animals had evolved over long periods of time from simpler life forms. Within this argument Darwin claimed that among groups of species many more are born than can possibly survive and this results in a “struggle for existence” causing some to adapt to better fit the environment than others. Those that adapted survived while those that did not became extinct. Those adapted survival traits were passed down from one generation to another while those species who did not adapt and died without passing down their traits thus producing a stronger and more desirable species. Darwin called this process natural selection. In 1871 Darwin published another work *The Descent of Man* in which he extended his argument of natural selection to those rules that govern

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<sup>221</sup> “The Old Charity and the New: An address before the annual meeting of the Charity Organization Society of the City of New York” by Rev. H.L. Wayland, D.D., February 1, 1886 in *Charity Organization Society of Buffalo, New York*, Lehman Social Sciences Library, Columbia University.

the human species. Humans evolution operated in the same way it did for other living species and thus humans had to develop certain traits in order to survive.

Darwin's ideas were taken in a new direction when English sociologist and philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) applied them to human society. In a theory known as Social Darwinism, Spencer asserted that societies and social classes were also under the constraints of natural selection and must adapt traits that enable it to best survive. He coined the phrase "survival of the fittest" when referring to the evolution of society and classes. The theory of Social Darwinism was incredibly seductive to members of the upper- and middle-classes. There remained within Western society a reliance upon what was learned from past intellectual movements like the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment. Modern society was a product of many of its ideas and all individuals had to do was look around to see its impact. Furthermore, the scientific basis for Social Darwinism also made it particularly appealing especially when coupled with the intellectual disciplines of anthropology and sociology. In the nineteenth century mind nature seemed an immutable source whose truth could be discovered using science and, after revealing this truth, could expose the disposition of groups within society. Therefore, as thinkers, politicians, and reformers, of the nineteenth century attempted to come to terms with modernity they also formed ideas on how to understand the actions of society's atavists and recidivists. The theory of Social Darwinism gave the changes seen by the bourgeoisie an additional element of concern. Now, the demoralization of the poor was understood as a sign of their biological unfitness and left unchecked would lead to a weakening of society. Anxieties over mass riots, unrest in industrial cities, the appeal of socialism and Marxism, and worries over health and disease, encouraged nineteenth century medical professionals, politicians, and social reformers to valorize and



normalize the inherent traits of the upper- and middle-classes all at a time of increased cultural ascendancy for them.

European and American society experienced profound transformations as a result of scientific inventions and intellectual developments related to the modernization process, and individuals sought answers and stability to what seemed to be a rapidly changing world. For members of the ruling classes, relying on liberal economic and political thought, there developed a desire to restrict who could lead and take part in this society. While liberal ideas advocated democracy, individualism, and reason, these rights needed to be limited to those whose traits were best suited for these roles. Thus, using biology, anthropology, and the belief in naturalism, scientific racism and scientific sexism emerged as means of exclusion and repression of non-heteronormative standards. In relation to class, the new social order created class awareness and as capitalistic markets assumed primacy, class consciousness became the distinguishing feature between individuals. No longer could the supremacy of white androcentric normality be enough, there had to be an exclusion of lower- and working-class individuals, whose values, morals, and biological makeup were understood as decidedly less than those values of the bourgeoisie. Therefore, just as the transformation of liberal ideals produced the oppression of non-whites and females, so too did it subjugate society's lower classes.

Much of the scholarship analyzing the fears of degeneration center around the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault, which profoundly transformed the way historians and social scientists understood the formation of modern society, the state, and its relationship to individuals. Foucault's work demonstrates a fixation upon the notion of power.<sup>222</sup> In his analysis on power in

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<sup>222</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

modern society, Foucault applied his theories of power and knowledge to society to show that institutions functioned as a form of social control to keep certain groups, such as the bourgeoisie, at the center of power. In his work, *Discipline and Punish* (1977) Foucault analyzes the history of penal systems in which the regulation, control, and remission of criminal behavior provides a prime avenue to emphasize the role of power within modern society. Punishment became a measured response to a particular crime, so that punishment's certainty and not its horror discouraged criminal behavior. There also emerged the notion that punishment could be used to reform and improve individuals as the prison became the center for correction. Figures such as wardens, ministers, doctors, and poor guardians took part in providing punishment in the hopes of reforming the soul. Individuals were understood as not reacting to a certain set of circumstances, but their inherent lawlessness and moral depravity facilitated their actions. Therefore, a discursive power relationship emerged which sought to regulate the behavior of those groups who participated in criminal behavior or held the potential to commit this behavior.

Foucault analyzed the concept of the 'delinquent,' a relatively new concept to the late nineteenth century that was heavily influenced by the element of class and a response to the growing concerns over the increasing urban masses. The delinquent came from society's lower classes and described as demonstrating 'abnormal' behavior. Through this definition, the power relationship continued its presence by allowing those in control, such as those from the middle- and upper-classes to valorize their inherent traits and characteristics, such as hard work, thriftiness, reason, morally sensible, and biologically fit. This also facilitated the demonization of the traits they found most prominent in society's unruly and volatile classes -- poverty, lawlessness, hostility, biological degeneration, indecency, and moral decay.

As delinquency characterized the lower classes, their actions encouraged the easiness of their supervision and therefore their control. The supervision, or observation that facilitated the control of the lower classes is what Foucault termed the ‘gaze.’ This concept was an impressively powerful tool used for control in the hands of society’s influencers such as state authorities, doctors, lawyers, and social reformers. “[I]n order to be exercised, this power had to be given the instrument of permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance, capable of making all visible, as long as it could itself remain invisible. It had to be like a faceless gaze that transformed the whole social body into a field of perception: thousands of eyes posted everywhere, mobile attentions ever on the alert, a long, hierarchized network...[a]nd this unceasing observation had to be accumulated in a series of reports and registers. And, unlike the methods of judicial or administrative writing, what was registered in this way were forms of behavior, attitudes, possibilities, suspicions- a permanent account of individuals’ behavior.”<sup>223</sup> As Foucault’s description demonstrates, the ‘gaze’ permeated society and it was not limited to those committing crimes, or those who committed crimes in the past. The ‘gaze’ was used on those lower classes who held the potential, because of their biological and social status, to commit crimes.

Evidence that supports the assertion that fears over a degenerating working class were prevalent in the second half of the nineteenth century are evident in the work of intellectuals, politicians, and reformers. Like, French psychiatrist Bénédict Augustin Morel (1808-1873), who developed a hereditarian theory of degeneration, or Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909), who established the discipline of criminal anthropology. Most known for his *L'uomo delinquente*, a foundational text of criminal anthropology, Lombroso altered the social dialogue from anxiety of crime to concern about criminality and the born criminal. Lombroso and his colleagues’ creation

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<sup>223</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 214.

of “the criminal” used “technologies of counting and calculation” to “reconfigure crime as a social and scientific problem: a patterned and predictable consequence of social life.”<sup>224</sup> For Lombroso, evidence for the criminal was always found within the body, a decades old technique that originated earlier in the Enlightenment with Carl Linnaeus’s taxonomy that encouraged the classification of humans based on biological markers. The creation of criminal anthropology used the body as the ultimate source of proof to find just how ‘dangerous’ an individual was predisposed to be. In England, Henry Maudsley’s (1835-1918) work in psychiatry allowed him to have influence in the social debates surrounding the issue of degeneration. Each of these individuals’ ideas and work was published and exchanged throughout the Western world providing the building blocks for reformers to assert solutions to their social problems.

While the espied consequences of degeneration were the same in various locations, the response to its effects demonstrates a specificity to the socio-political concerns of each location. Each nation understood the issue of degeneration to be politically complex but always wanted to come back to a single origin of the issue, one that was biologically determined by nature. Despite any common features present between the various countries there was, however, no dominant theory of degeneration in the nineteenth century. It took many different forms in an effort to resolve modernity’s plaguing uncertainties.

In all of the idiosyncrasies behind the ideas of degeneration, there were two overlapping conceptions of the issue. One was about the degenerate himself and the other about the larger problem of degeneration. Each of these conceptions held a distinct class-based element in that the degenerate came from the lower strata of society and the problem of degeneration was a concern

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<sup>224</sup> David G. Horn, *The Criminal Body: Lombroso and the Anatomy of Deviance*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 6.

directed toward the unruly lower classes. Historian Daniel Pick in his work *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder* (1989) argues, “The tension between the image of the degenerate and the unseen essence of degeneration rejoined a tension inherent in earlier discourses of ‘the dangerous classes’ of the city. Perceived as visibly different, anomalous and racially ‘alien’, the problem was simultaneously their apparent invisibility in the flux of the great city.”<sup>225</sup> Concern over the dangerous classes was really a concern over the mob, more than the individual. To the ruling class, whose array of concerns plagued their existence, felt that only through the “total moralization of the masses” could degeneracy end.<sup>226</sup> This would be a driving motivation to push reformers to embracing the Elberfeld System through its investigative research into the lives of the poor and the building of personal relationships with the poor in order to reform their behavior.

For Germany it was the language used by lawyers, administrators, police officers, and the bourgeoisie about degeneracy and the ‘underworld’ of the impoverished and the criminal that defined their experiences with it. For example, in the 1860s professional trickster Franz Ernst created a trail of deception in which he created artificial identities to facilitate the creation of organized crime in larger German cities. Administrators and policemen interpreted the actions of Ernst and other like him as the embodiment of the underworld. Authorities believed that the lower classes actually aided the flourishing of this world by supplying most of its members. For the upper-classes the underworld operated with the help of the commonalties between its members, similarly to what Lombroso argued for in looking for physical markers of criminals. Beyond physical markers, the underworld had, according to critics, its own language to communicate with signals to recognize each other, such as “winking with the left eye while glancing to the left...or

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<sup>225</sup> Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, C.1848-1918*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 52.

<sup>226</sup> Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*, 54.

closing their fists in a particular way.”<sup>227</sup> Not only did criminals share a language of degeneracy but so too did the bourgeoisie in their interpretation of them. In analyzing the language used to talk about criminals over the entire nineteenth century it “shifted from the ascription of deliberate maleficence to the attribution of personal weakness and finally to the assumption of hereditary damage.”<sup>228</sup> Ultimately the language on the underworld was less about the deviants and criminals of that society and more about affirming the respectable and virtuous norms of bourgeoisie society and positioning a fixed reference point in which to ‘other’ those who did not fit into accepted behaviors.

As convincing as Foucault’s theory of power relationships can be it also runs the risk of being too reductionist. Therefore, caution is needed when applying his theories that power cannot be understood as one-way progression of the state in complete control. Rather power is a constant dynamic in which various groups will have different levels of power at different times. By viewing power relationships simply through Foucault’s framework, it can operate as a ideological straightjacket. While it is not wrong to say that bourgeois social reformers sought ways to maintain their power and influence over society, especially the part of society they saw as degenerating, it is wrong to make the working-class a passive actor to this power relationship. Rather the working-class in Germany, England, and the United States, by the latter nineteenth century was exerting more political influence and pressure for their issues and concerns than ever before. In England, for example, this political power was translated into reality when members of the working class began holding positions in the House of Commons, on local town councils and school boards, and holding sway over community endeavors. Beyond this form of power, members of the working-

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<sup>227</sup> Richard J. Evans, *Tales from the German Underworld: Crime and Punishment in the Nineteenth Century*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 156.

<sup>228</sup> Evans, 7.

class formed political parties, went on strikes when wanting better labor conditions or pay, and formed societies or organizations that helped protect each other during life's most trying times. The working-class was not a passive victim to the power player of the bourgeoisie but a force within themselves that often drove the upper- and middle-classes to continuously vilify them. Another risk of holding too closely to Foucault's power theory is that it misses the genuine elements of reformers worldview. While some of their reasoning could be flawed, it is not constructive to simply relegate their work as that of manipulators for power or control. Reformers operated in a world in which Social Darwinism was accepted as scientific fact and the scientific legitimacy it claimed gave it even more influence. Furthermore, there was evidence to support their fears of degeneration all around them when they looked to the over-crowded and disease-ridden urban hovels. Their solutions to these problems were not motivated simply by a desire to control or manipulate individuals for their benefits but to solve problems that they seemed unable to grapple with otherwise. Ultimately, nineteenth century thinkers sought to answer the Social Question through viable solutions grounded in science that also upheld the social and economic status-quo. These solutions enabled a refashioning of modernity in a way that middle- and upper-class individuals could validate their own values and social norms while also coming to terms with managing its uncertainty.

The rapid industrial growth of the second half of the nineteenth century and the cataclysmic turns of the 1870s had obliterated older notions of poverty, subsuming them under broader notions of a struggling working class. These developments were alarming to contemporaries, and as Foucault would argue, warranted social control to preserve an old elite and a middle-class that had just achieved a measure of political and social ascendancy. Bourgeois reformers were not blindly looking to retain power; rather, they also wanted to help. But these same well-meaning reformers

had become segregated socially from the poor over time and had come to see the poor embedded in big transformations that led them to embrace scientific solutions to treat the problem systematically. With such transformations, it is expected that older forms of community-based, personalized poor relief to give away in favor of modern welfare states, or at least to linger on as vestigial relics. Yet the social anxiety over mass pauperization along with notions of delinquency, pushed reformers of the era to see the need for the preservation of person-to-person care, only now for a different set of reasons. This explains why the interest in the Elberfeld System would persist even in the emerging era of welfare states.

### **Intercultural Transfer and the Elberfeld System**

The methodology that supports the interest and exchange of the Elberfeld System between Germany, England, and the United States is the concept of intercultural transfer. This idea was put forward first by Michel Espagne and Michal Werner in the 1980s when they analyzed the transfers between Germany and France.<sup>229</sup> Broadly the concept of intercultural transfer refers to “the movement of material objects, people, and ideas between two separate and clearly defined cultures and societies.”<sup>230</sup> Within this transfer process there is an underlying assumption of openness within each nation that facilitates the exchange of ideas. In the process of exchange, ideas do not remain stagnant but can undergo various modifications to fit the locale in which it is being introduced and at the same time its introduction, despite any modifications, aids in diversifying the society. One

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<sup>229</sup> Michel Espagne and Michael Werner, *Transferts, les relations interculturelles dans l'espace franco-allemand XVIIIe et XIXe siècle*, (Paris: Éd. Recherche sur les civilisations, 1988). Other scholars who have utilized and built upon this framework see: Matthais Middell, ed., *Kulturtransfer und Vergleich*, (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2000); Gabriele Lingelbach, “Einträge und Grenzen zweier Ansätze: Kulturtransfer und Vergleich am Beispiel der französischen und amerikanischen Geschichtswissenschaft während des 19. Jahrhunderts,” in Christoph Conrad and Sebastian Conrad eds., *Die Nation schreiben: Geschichtswissenschaft im internationalen Vergleich* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 333-359; Johannes Paulmann, “Internationaler Vergleich und interkultureller Transfer: Zwei Forschungsansätze zur europäischen Geschichte des 18. bis 20. Jahrhunderts,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 267 (1998), 649-685.

<sup>230</sup> Thomas Adam, *Buying Respectability: Philanthropy and Urban Society in Transnational Perspective, 1840s to 1930s*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 3.



of the benefits of utilizing the framework of intercultural transfer is its distinctiveness from nationally based histories. Intercultural transfer helps to diminish the tendency to view developments as a result of national uniqueness or exceptionalism. Within the historiography of the welfare state, no work demonstrates this better than Daniel Rodgers' *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (1998). Rodgers places the social policies of American Progressives within a transatlantic context. He contends that the origins of America's welfare state is best understood as a product from the sharing of ideas and policies from around the world, but specifically from Great Britain and Germany. Rodgers argues that the United States has always maintained a unique connection to the transatlantic world in lieu of the fact that it began as an imperial endeavor by other nations. He terms the transatlantic setting as a "connective lifeline- a seaway for the movement of people, goods, ideas, and aspirations."<sup>231</sup> Due to this connection, he insists that the history of the United States during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries must be understood as a part of the North Atlantic economy. While this connection is often understood by American historians, Rodgers asserts that scholars do not embrace this connection in their scholarly work. Trivialized to simplistic relationships and ways in which national difference emerged between American and its European counterparts, many scholars cut themselves short in further connections that could be made. Rodgers sees these approaches as an "analytical cage" and seeks to transcend "the boundaries of the nation-state."<sup>232</sup> By recognizing that all communities are in a constant state of flux and illuminating those elements that are shared between cultures, it provides a fuller picture of how ideas and institutions, like poverty and the welfare state, develop.

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<sup>231</sup> Daniel Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 1.

<sup>232</sup> Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 2.

Transnational historian Thomas Adam has expanded upon Espagne and Werner's concept by applying it to the world of philanthropy. More specifically, Adam has investigated the transnational links between Germany, Great Britain, and the United States within the field of philanthropic endeavors looking at connections in the formation of museums, art galleries, libraries, and social housing enterprises. This examination is particularly beneficial and complementary to an analysis into poor relief and charity efforts like that of the Elberfeld System and the Charity Organization movement. Adam finds that the process of intercultural transfer is carried out through the work of individual agency. These agents were not those necessarily in positions of power like diplomats or ambassadors, nor was it those who made a career as being agents of transfer. Rather these were individuals who had both the means and time to travel to various places and write about (and eventually publish) their experiences. Adam utilizes Thorstein Veblen's term "leisure class" to characterize these individuals asserting that this designation fits better when looking for these transfer agents in various locales.<sup>233</sup> The "leisure class" refers to those within Western society that can be marked by their ability to consume, a self-assertion of their leadership within society, and a good reputation that would allow their recommendations to carry weight. While religious impulses and humanist inclinations were an important motivator most of the agents did not operate for only these reasons. Adam asserts that these factors were present but that endeavors around philanthropy "were always a public and publicized event." Agents could, and did, hold simultaneously "a feeling of responsibility but also wanted to be recognized by peers."<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*, (New York: Modern Library, 1934).

<sup>234</sup> Adam, *Buying Respectability*, 8.

While the framework for intercultural transfer is useful for wide- ranging periods of time, it is particularly well suited for an analysis in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries when travel was easier than ever before, printing and publication of literature was at an all-time high, and thanks to increasing literacy rates more people could read the writings of these agents thus expanding their sphere of influence. During this time new public institutions were taking shape as a result of expanded free-market capitalism, mass industrialization and urbanization, the growth of state bureaucracies, and changes in suffrage laws expanding the pool of eligible voters who now had a say in the political process. These were phenomena that were not unique to one nation but were developments in all three of the major industrial powers of the time. Adam posits that as these public institutions came into being reformers had the opportunity to be involved in order “to define the public sphere according to their desires and value systems” enabling them to operate under a “cultural power structure that runs parallel to the political power structure.”<sup>235</sup> While Adam sees this occurring within the realm of philanthropy it is also prevalent for poor relief reform and private charity endeavors. Beyond the common institutions developing was a common set of problems in each location that one area may have a solution for. When intercultural transfer takes place, it is an understanding that there is a unique need within one location that another has made headway in solving or has pursued a policy or initiative that seems to fit well in that location. This, for example, is what draws individuals to Elberfeld in that agents recognized the same problems of rapid industrialization and urbanization being dealt with effectively within the German city and though it could be useful back in their own communities. Ultimately, upper- and middle-class reformers wanted to use their power to leverage a society that placed them and their values at the center in order to save a society that they saw as rapidly degenerating.

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<sup>235</sup> Adam, *Buying Respectability*, 8.

Awareness of the Elberfeld System came to England through the work of a Scottish minister who learned of the System after reading the proceedings of the *Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentag* (The German Protestant Church Assembly) in 1858. At this conference, organized by the Assembly's charity and social work group known as Innere Mission, the Mayor of Elberfeld Lischke gave a report on the relief efforts of the city. Reverend W.F. Stevenson (1832-1886) then reached out directly to Daniel von der Heydt in order to find out more of the System's workings. Stevenson's interest in Elberfeld stemmed from the same dissatisfaction held by his English counterparts over the inadequacy and impersonality of the Poor Laws. For Stevenson, however, he harkened back to a period in the 1840s when the Church still claimed responsibility for poor relief. Interestingly, in Stevenson's dialogue with von der Heydt and his intrigue into the Elberfeld System, he came to discover that part of Elberfeld's influence came from the work of a Glasgow physician Dr. Thomas Chalmers in the 1820s. Chalmers was not only a proponent for Church based poor relief, he also organized a relief system within Glasgow's St. John's Parish which operated under the methods of "personal visitation of the parish by deacons, the proper selection and conduct of these deacons, [and] the administration of help through them instead of through parish officials."<sup>236</sup> Therefore some of Elberfeld's administration structure was taken from the work of Dr. Chalmers and Stevenson pointed out, "The architects of the Elberfeld System had made a point of referring to Chalmers as their precedent" in the System's creation."<sup>237</sup> This earlier idea by Dr. Chalmers also complements the framework of intercultural transfer in that it assumes that ideas are constantly being traded in both directions. Adam asserts that "ideas travel back and forth between one or more societies and sometimes undergo so many changes that an idea may no

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<sup>236</sup> W.F. Stevenson, "Doctor Chalmers at Elberfeld" in *Good Words* ed. Norman Macleod (1860) 5-8.

<sup>237</sup> E.P. Hennock, "German Models for British Social Reform: Compulsory Insurance and the Elberfeld System of Poor Relief," in *Aneignung und Abwehr: Interkultureller Transfer Zwischen Deutschland und Großbritannien im 19. Jahrhundert*, eds. R. Muhs, J. Paulmann, and W. Steinmetz (Bodenheim: Philo, 1998), 135.

longer be recognizable.”<sup>238</sup> Thus it is unsurprising that Elberfeld’s creators had taken part of their inspiration from an earlier intercultural exchange encounter.

Stevenson was pleased and surprised to find this Scottish connection to a relief system he learned about through a foreign religious organization. He stated,

This, however, is certain and gratifying, that the parochial system of St. John’s has been reproduced in Elberfeld on a large scale, embracing the entire population, and that in those principles of poor relief for which Dr. Chalmers contended, the only extrication has been found from the embarrassments which threatened that city.”<sup>239</sup> What particularly drew Stevenson’s admiration for the Elberfeld System was not so much its Scottish connection but rather the mindset and perception towards poverty that the founders of the Elberfeld System possessed. He stated. “This was what these men in Elberfeld thought, that it is selfishness to stow poverty in an almshouse, and never touch it with a little finger, though it has father and children, and heart and brain, as well as we; that poverty will never come to an end that way; and that we are in the world not so much to carry out the poor-laws as to love our brother. This was the foundation on which their plan rose. The official relation to the poor must cease, and give place to the personal, aid must be granted not by statute but by men whom the poor feel to care for them. Attain this, they said, and the rest will spring from it; better feeling, fewer poor, lighter taxes, less imposture, stead care.”<sup>240</sup>

After giving a brief description of the System’s organization and administration, Stevenson urged his readers to consider adopting a similar System in Scotland. He implored:

Is it not worth while to try some effort, not to stave off misfortune, but to avert it? Is not Dr. Chalmers’ plan worth being tested once again? Elberfeld has shewn, at least, that it is possible. Are men less willing, less interested? Have we the poor less upon our hearts? Or, rather are not the workers ready, if there were only the guiding hand to shape the work? We may find fault with the Elberfeld organisation, we may say its not adapted to our wants; the principle remains intact; if it has been wrought into use and blessing there, it is hard to see why it could not be wrought into as much use and blessing here. It may be that this hasty sketch of what is doing in Germany will lead some one to think of what may be done in England, that the new

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<sup>238</sup> Thomas Adam, *Intercultural Transfers and the Making of the Modern World, 1800-2000: Sources and Context*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 5.

<sup>239</sup> Stevenson, “Doctor Chalmers at Elberfeld.”

<sup>240</sup> Stevenson, “Doctor Chalmers at Elberfeld.”

birth and glory of a half-forgotten truth will give some one boldness to begin, let it be in ever so narrow a sphere, what was never really a failure at St. John's.<sup>241</sup>

The writings of Stevenson did not fall on deaf ears but were picked up by his friend Dr. Norman Macleod (1812-1872) who edited the *Good Words* periodical that Stevenson published his findings in and who himself was a well-known minister in Edinburgh. Stevenson's description of Elberfeld and its connection to Dr. Chalmers in Scotland "struck him so much that he determined to see for himself what the writer described."<sup>242</sup> In early 1863 Macleod organized a trip with three friends, including Stevenson, to travel to Germany and see the Elberfeld System in action for themselves. Upon their return they chronicled what they saw in an article published in *Good Words* titled "Up the Rhine in Winter By Four Friends." They found that in the three years since Stevenson's investigation it had "only confirmed them" that "in all this Elberfeld sets an excellent example as a city that cares for its own and those of its own house."<sup>243</sup> In the writer's initial reflection on what they witnessed the focus was on how well a civic organized system of poor relief could operate. Three of the four men on the journey were members of the clergy, and so they each felt deeply that Christian guidance and influence should be central to any method of charity or poor relief, but they were also willing to concede when civic authority carried out the Christian duty well. The four travelers closed their remarks on the Elberfeld System by connecting it to the Parable of the Good Samaritan saying "it has been shown that even a mere civic poor-law would work well when administered voluntarily, when it brings the helper into personal contact with the helped. And after all, that is the Christian principle, which will not suffer the wounded

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<sup>241</sup> Stevenson, "Doctor Chalmers at Elberfeld."

<sup>242</sup> Donald Macleod, *Memoir of Norman Macleod*, vol 2, (New York: R. Worthington, 1876), 131.

<sup>243</sup> "Up the Rhine in Winter By Four Friends," in *Good Words*, volume 3 (1863), 404.

man to be passed by because there are not magistrates and police to look after him, but will stop and help him because he is wounded.”<sup>244</sup>

Macleod would expand upon his trip to and investigation of Elberfeld in 1867 when he published *How can we best relieve our deserving poor?* In which he lauded its organization as a model for voluntary charity to work alongside legal obligations of relief.<sup>245</sup> Between the investigative efforts of Reverends Stevenson and Macleod and their writings on the System awareness of Elberfeld’s relief structure spread. The first significant attempt to implement these ideas in Scotland came through the work of Dr. Alexander Wood (1817-1884) in 1868 in his founding of the Edinburgh Association for Improving the Conditions of the Poor. He took from the Elberfeld System its organization method of breaking the city down into districts, using volunteer guardians (called visitors), and a code of conduct visitors would adhere to along with guidelines for how to care for those in need. Even the bi-monthly meeting for consultation and the reporting of cases was adopted.<sup>246</sup>

From the Scottish interest in Elberfeld came the connection to English reformers and critics of their own Poor Laws. The two early leading English proponents of the Elberfeld System who would go on to lead the private and public efforts to adopt the System in England were C.B.P Bosanquet and William Rathbone (1819-1902). Bosanquet came from a prominent gentry family and was the half-brother to British idealist philosopher Bernard Bosanquet. As a lawyer and resident of London he saw firsthand the problems plaguing the city’s Poor Law operations. In 1868 Bosanquet wrote and published *London: Some Accounts of its Growth, Charitable Agencies, and*

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<sup>244</sup> Up the Rhine in Winter By Four Friends, 404. See also Luke 10:25-37.

<sup>245</sup> Norman Macleod, *How can we best relieve our deserving poor?* (1867).

<sup>246</sup> Thomas Brown, *Alexander Wood: A Sketch of His Life and Work*, (Edinburgh: Macniven & Wallace, 1886), 152-153.

*Wants* in which he postulated an acceptance of Elberfeld principles while also recognizing its connection to Dr. Chalmers, Scotland, and Christian influenced foundations. In this work Bosanquet lamented the poor organization of the English, and London in particular, Poor Law operations. Bosanquet challenged most of his efforts to bring the System to England through the founding of the London Charity Organisation Society in 1869 and served as the charity's first secretary helping to establish its mission and operating functions.

The other leading proponent was Liverpool merchant and member of the House of Commons William Rathbone. Similarly to Bosanquet, Rathbone helped establish the Liverpool Charity Relief Society which pursued analogous goals to that of London's Charity Organisation Society. What made Rathbone such an important figure for the spread of Elberfeld principles was his attempts for consideration by the British government. The work of Stevenson, Macleod, and Bosanquet was focused on private charity work but Rathbone wanted to see if something could be done in reforming the legal structure of the Poor Laws to adopt elements of the Elberfeld System. For Rathbone, the Poor Law, in its current state, was limited in what it could achieve. He stated, "As a system of public charity it fails together. It is beyond the omnipotence of Parliament to meet the conflicting claims of justice to the community, severity to the idle and vicious, and mercy to those stricken down into penury."<sup>247</sup> Rathbone was able to convince Sir James Stansfeld, who was the president of the Local Government Board, to send out the Parliamentary backed investigation of Elberfeld in 1871 led by Andrew Doyle, who at this stage was a senior Poor Law inspector.

After the trip was organized, Rathbone went with Doyle to Elberfeld in November 1871. Upon bearing witness to the city and System itself he remarked on its most salient features: the

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<sup>247</sup> Eleanor Florence Rathbone, *William Rathbone: A Memoir*, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1905), 367.



personal relationship built with the poor and the job of poor guardians held by “ordinary busy men [who] can do the work without serious interference with their own labour.”<sup>248</sup> Once Rathbone and Doyle returned home and Doyle’s report submitted to the Local Government Board expanded the general awareness of the System to England’s residents. Several articles in the *London Times* referred to the System in the late 1860s but after the 1871 report it increased in its presence in not only the *Times* but also in the *Pall Mall Gazette* and *The Spectator*. Most of the articles printed in the papers extolled the Elberfeld System and the solutions it could provide. Even one Letter to the Editor in the *London Times* remarked in December 1871, “In reference to your excellent and seasonable article on the Elberfeld System of relief to the poor, allow me to draw the attention of your readers to the fact that a system which includes all the means and method practiced at Elberfeld is actually in operation in London, and that the only two *desiderata* necessary to make it as effective as it is at Elberfeld are, first, its complete and uniform adoption throughout the metropolis; and, secondly, a sufficiency of voluntary workers, - that is, of men and women willing and able to do what true charity most demands, - give a personal attention to its duties.”<sup>249</sup> What is interesting about this statement is that the author believed that what the COS was doing was equal to what was occurring in Elberfeld but also that it needed to be adopted legally within Great Britain to have real effect.

While Rathbone’s initiative to get a legal look at Elberfeld increased awareness it was also increased when Bosanquet facilitated the translation and publication of *Das Armenwesen und die Armengesetzgebung in Europäischen Staaten* which held important information of poor relief throughout Europe but contained a whole chapter dedicated to the Elberfeld System. Many other

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<sup>248</sup> Rathbone, *William Rathbone*, 280-281.

<sup>249</sup> Hawksley Thos. “Charity Organization.” *The Times* (London, England). Tuesday, Dec 12, 1871; pg. 12; Issue 27244.

British citizens and reformers began to write and laud the Elberfeld Principles, calling on Christian duty and responsibility as fellow Englishmen to pursue such a System. What is intriguing about the efforts of reformers and the writings of average citizens is the lack of discussion of Elberfeld or Germany writ large being a place that was either unworthy of emulation or too unlike England to be of value to study for new solutions to problems. Rather these reformers saw a similar set of problems produced by the same causes of industrialization and urbanization and effective solutions that could be emulated. Some even suggested that Germany was superior to England in regards to how it managed its poor. For example, evangelical minister Richard Hibbs wrote in 1876 on the Elberfeld System, “This is Prussia’s method of assisting the poor. May England, for once, confess that she has been misled by her self-styled Political Economists, and learn, though late, “the more excellent way.” For England’s God it is that bids her “go and do likewise.”<sup>250</sup>

There were, no doubt, real differences between the two countries. One of the more frequently mentioned variances was the size of the city of Elberfeld as compared to London or Liverpool, but even this seemed unimportant. The other major difference between Germany and England was the compulsory poor guardian service required by Elberfeld’s citizens. Many admirers of the System tried to pass this requirement off as a desire that would be present in any true Christian, so it should not be a problem if enacted. However, when Andrew Doyle went on his investigative mission in 1871, he was careful to balance his praise for where it could also fall short in England. He stated, “In England it might be less difficult to reconcile the poor to such a system that it would be to find amongst the well-to-do middle-classes fit and willing agents for its administration.”<sup>251</sup> When another Parliamentary investigation was sent in 1888 John Davy, an

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<sup>250</sup> Richard Hibbs, *Prussia and the Poor; or Observations upon the systematized relief of the poor at Elberfeld, in contrast with that of England. Founded upon a visit and personal inquiry*, (London: Williams and Norgate, 1876), 8.

<sup>251</sup> British Parliamentary Papers, 1872 [C. 516] Local Government Report, *First Annual Report* (1871-1872), “The Poor Law System of Elberfeld” Report from Andrew Doyle, Esq., 256.

English Poor Law inspector, echoed Doyle's hesitation when in his answer to a meeting of a House of Lords Committee on Poor Law Relief stated "I think there is a great deal to be learned from it, but I do not think there is the least chance of our successfully substituting for paid relieving officers voluntary workers."<sup>252</sup>

This was really the heart of the difference between Germany and England, and this difference could also be extended to the United States. The difference lay in how each country understood and applied ideas of citizenship. In Germany, poor relief was interwoven as an element of citizenship, as something that you had a right to receive in times of distress or something you participated in for those who were in distress. In keeping with this line of thought, there were consequences for a dereliction of civic duty which was why Elberfeld's city officials, and those other locations who adopted the System, implemented the loss of voting rights in municipal elections and higher taxes for those who chose not to participate. As articulated by the Elberfeld System's founders, who took it from the work of reformers in Hamburg in 1788, the need to connect individuals to the working of state functions like poor relief made them acutely invested in its successes and setbacks. Rather than relegating their responsibility to paid officers or a poor tax. For the English proponents of the Elberfeld System, like William Rathbone, there was a real hope that England's attitude towards adopting this compulsory element of poor relief into the facets of citizenship would be positive and open to it. In a letter Rathbone wrote in 1886 to his friend H. G. Willink detailing the intricacies of the Elberfeld System and its potential adoption in Liverpool he asserted that, "I utterly decline to believe so meanly of our citizen as to doubt that, if once convinced that the work is practicable and ought to be done, we shall not find plenty of

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<sup>252</sup> Great Britain. Parliament. House of Lords. Select Committee on Poor Law Relief., *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on Poor Law Relief; together with the proceedings of the Committee, minutes of evidence, and appendix*, (London: Printed by Henry Hansard and Son; and published by Eyre and Spottiswoode, ...; Adam and Charles Black, ... Edinburgh; and Hodges, Figgis, and Co., ... Dublin, 1888), 121.

willing hands to help us do it.”<sup>253</sup> Charles Loch (1849-1923), who would replace Bosanquet as Secretary of the COS in 1875, travelled with Davy to Elberfeld in 1888. While Loch had been and would continue to be one of the Elberfeld System’s greatest admirers, he recognized its limitations within an English setting. At the same House of Lords meeting, Loch was asked as to whether or not he thought it was “possible or advisable” to introduce the Elberfeld System in England. His response demonstrated his admiration while also dealing with the citizenship problem.

I think we could assimilate our system slowly to something approaching the Elberfeld system; but the Elberfeld system has the advantage of being official, that is to say, the almoner has a sort of honorary post in the State; and then again the supervision at Elberfeld is extremely strict, far stricter at any rate than most parishes, and most charitable people would at present submit to. Then again there would have to be a division of London into small districts, which at present is hardly possible. Further, the Germans at Elberfeld are very proud of their citizen duties, and they work very hard to fulfil them; and in London, it would be extremely difficult at present to find the men, at any rate the trained men, indeed one might say, to find the men at all, who would fulfil such duties well. The whole system of German life is so different. There, of course, every individual is a taxpayer; and here, a very large number of those who live in small tenements never pay anything but their rent, because the landlord has arranged, under the Small Tenements Act, and the collection of Poor Rates Assessment Act, to pay in lump the rates over to the authorities; and from this and other causes there is, I think, not that reality of citizenship here that there is abroad. That is a point that was mentioned in the Report of the Royal Commission on Friendly Societies and I have heard it mentioned several times by persons able to form a judgement on the subject; and I cannot see how we can introduce such a system as that of Elberfeld into London, until we have, if I may say so, a development of citizenship.

This response was then followed up with a question clarifying the idea of citizenship Loch had in mind and whether this would include the working-class, particularly those whose taxes were paid by their landlord. The questioner pushed further saying “is it not a class somewhat above those” (meaning the non-rate payers) “to which you must look for carrying on an organized charitable

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<sup>253</sup> Rathbone, William. *A letter addressed to H.G. Willink by W. Rathbone, dated Jan. 1887, recommending the setting up of a poor law system in Liverpool based on the Elberfeld system. Followed by A letter addressed to the viscount Lyons, by sir J.A. Crowe, dated Nov. 26th, 1886, 9-10.*

system?” Loch believed, just as he saw carried out in Elberfeld that any system predicated on Elberfeld’s principles would include the working-class as participating members. He stated:

I think that if we are to adopt the standard of Elberfeld, we should have to get in altogether a different class from that which takes the leading part in charitable administration in London; I think that we should have to look forward to getting the best of the local people; certainly the working-class, certainly the tradesmen; and I think also that, apart from the direct intervention in municipal work of the class which would be affected by the Acts I have referred to, this throws upon them a distinct position in the community which has its value. It goes, I think, with much else in our system.<sup>254</sup>

Since England was the only country who legally, referring to government backed investigations and committee hearings, considered the adoption of the Elberfeld System these same citizenship questions and debates did not take place in the United States. Interest from the United States into the Elberfeld System came through the same Charity Organization movement prevalent in England and also through the work of a minister. The U.S. would not send individuals to Elberfeld to study the System but it nonetheless became part of the reformers vernacular. Ultimately, England would choose not to legally adopt the Elberfeld System and restructure the entire workings of the Poor Law. Rather the principles of this plan would continue to influence and operate within English society in the work of the COS. Despite no legal acceptance and policy adoption this did not mean that the System ceased being of interest to British social reformers or average citizens. Throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century and the years leading up to World War I the support for the Elberfeld System would continue to draw people to Germany such as when some of its admirers went over to Elberfeld to take part in the fifteenth anniversary celebration of the System’s operation. Such as when groups like the *Deutscher Verein für Armenpflege und Wohltätigkeit*, founded in 1880, became the leading intellectual circle for

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<sup>254</sup> *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on Poor Law Relief*, 452.

German poor relief and welfare practices that would share ideas with English and American counterparts and became the primary organization that drew international attention to the Elberfeld System. Or when individuals continued to write about the famed methods and organizational principles of knowing the poor hallmarked in the Elberfeld System years after the earlier investigations by Reverend Stevenson and Macleod or reformers Bosanquet and Rathbone. In 1901 English reformer Julie Sutter published her findings on a trip she made to Elberfeld to investigate the system and, having no prior knowledge of the earlier investigative trips made by several decades before, allowed her to claim that “the Elberfeld System is the healing hand laid on a great wound.”<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Julie Sutter, *Cities and Citizens: Or, Britains's Next Campaign* (London: H. Marshall & Son, 1901), 56.

Chapter Four: You Want to Know Them: The Elberfeld System and the Charity Organisation  
Society Movement in Great Britain

On April 29, 1869 the Society for Organising Charitable Relief and Repressing Mendicity took form in London with the goal of harmonizing the state's Poor Law structure with that of private charitable giving. Soon becoming known as the Charity Organisation Society (COS), this group became the primary avenue that Elberfeld principles would find their application within Great Britain and across the Atlantic to the United States. The development of the COS reflected some fundamental shifts within British political philosophy, a growing global industrial competitiveness, economic constriction, and a refashioning of poverty as a condition resulting from both individual choices and larger structural factors. As these shifts manifested themselves within British society, reformers emerged looking for solutions to new and unique challenges while also maintaining the classical liberal approach to government and the economy. A look towards Germany and the success the Elberfeld System had in local application held great potential. The interest in the Elberfeld System came through private citizen-reformers who learned about the System through various publications to government sponsored trips which sent over members of the Local Government Board. Both groups were motivated by a desire to see British society reformed and traveled to Elberfeld to see the System in action and learn from its leaders. This exchange continued from the 1870s through the outbreak of World War I. British interest in Elberfeld was not a one-sided endeavor but part of a larger transnational reform milieu that included interest in other poor relief schemes, urban renewal measures, such as settlement houses and tenement improvements, social insurance legislation, and education reform. Focusing on the role that the Elberfeld System plays within the transnational reform milieu through the avenue of the COS movement demonstrates a common, yet underemphasized, process of intercultural

exchange and cooperation in matters of poor relief, which were inseparable from the emerging trends of industrialization and indispensable to the formation of modern welfare states. As the case of the Elberfeld System shows, strategies for dealing with poverty, and for that matter notions of what poverty was and why it persisted, were by no means confined to any one national space.

The COS's relationship to the Elberfeld System was not one of whole-scale adoption. Rather just as other German cities were drawn to the System's principles, so too were COS reformers. The COS would function differently under Elberfeld guidelines in relation to its association with the state and municipal authorities, the existing Poor Law structure, and the Church. Furthermore, traditional scholarship on the COS has cast significant doubt to the organization's effectiveness thus masking the impact that Elberfeld principles had within British society and welfare-state formation.<sup>256</sup> A reassessment that looks not at success or failure as the guide to evaluating the role and impact that the COS had and its adoption of Elberfeld principles but rather why COS leaders looked to Germany and how they implemented the principles demonstrates a more complex relationship between the major industrial powers. As Europe seemed headed toward increasing antagonism and competition on the world stage, the sphere of reform was blossoming into increased cooperation and reliance to solve the challenges posed by modern society. Ultimately, this shared interest and growing relationship proves that Europeans, and to some degree the Americans as well, saw greater commonality within themselves and the obstacles they faced rather than national uniqueness and separation.

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<sup>256</sup> See Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*; Charles Loch Mowat, *The Charity Organisation Society 1869-1913*, (London, 1961); David Owen, *English Philanthropy, 1660-1960*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964); Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1991); Jane Lewis, *The Voluntary Sector, the State, and Social Work in Britain: The Charity Organisation Society/Family Welfare Association since 1869*, (Brookfield, VT: Edward Elgar, 1995); Robert Humphreys, *Sin, Organized Charity and the Poor Law in Victorian England*, (London: St. Martins Press, 1995).



## **British Idealism and Citizenship**

Within the shifts brought to British society by the mid-nineteenth century, there was none more influential for the understanding of poverty than the emergence of the Idealist philosophy. British Idealism emerged out of the work of German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) who arose in response to Immanuel Kant's Critical Philosophy (1724-1804). German Idealism came about in the aftermath of the Enlightenment and French Revolution and the upheaval these moments brought. However, Idealism also tried to make sense of how these consequential events would be received by society. While Kant's work produced problematic contradictions, Hegel and those like him such as Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854), focused on bridging these contradictions by looking at forms of knowledge and how individuals come to knowledge. Hegel argued that the world is best understood through active engagement rather than passive contemplation. This active engagement produces an understanding of the world based upon observation and reason. Hegel, for example, saw the changes brought by early industrialization in Britain and the French Revolution and asserted that through engaging with the impact of these events his native Germany could pursue a different approach to change through the active pursuits of social elites and the state. Hegel would specifically laud the actions of an enlightened monarch who could utilize the state to enact change.

Broadly speaking, Hegel's idealist philosophy had tremendous influence on British thinkers who were drawn to Idealism's understanding of the role of the state and its interaction with society. As British Idealism took hold in the mid-nineteenth century through the work of philosophers like Henry Sidgwick (1838-1900), Thomas Hill Green (1836-1882), and Alfred Marshall (1842-1924). Idealism came first to Scotland and then moved into Oxford intellectual

circles, but it quickly spread beyond these points to find itself as the dominant philosophy of the day.<sup>257</sup>

While Hegel's idealist philosophy proved important for COS development scholars have debated the role that Hegel played within the particular vein of British Idealism that influenced the COS movement. Hegel believed that poverty was one of the most pressing concerns of political and social life because of its connection to citizenship. He asserted that the deprivation experienced by members of a society could prevent collective progress given that some were left behind due to inequalities in wealth. Yet Hegel also struggled to determine how best to do this without infringing upon individualism. For idealist leaders of the COS movement they liked the emphasis of protecting individualism and targeting poor relief to individual aid.<sup>258</sup> However, historian José Harris argues that while many British philosophers and social scientists were aware of and drawn to Hegel's theories this was largely a superficial connection. She posits that by looking at the literature written by British idealists dealing with "applied social science and practical social policy, Hegel was rarely more than a distant and marginal point of reference."<sup>259</sup> COS idealists had an even more complex relationship with Hegel, argues Harris, in which many of whom called themselves Hegelians but seemed uninformed of Hegel's views on social welfare. Using Hegel's work *The Philosophy of Right*, Harris claims "Hegel's view that charity and social welfare were fully "rational" only insofar as they were de-personalized and automatic." Hegel himself stated that "Public social conditions are...to be regarded as all the more perfect the less [in comparison to what is arranged publicly] is left for an individual to do by himself as his private inclination

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<sup>257</sup> David Boucher and Andrew Vincent, *British Idealism and Political Theory*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 2.

<sup>258</sup> Andrew Vincent and Raymond Plant, *Philosophy, Politics, and Citizenship: The Life and Thought of the British Idealists*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 94-95.

<sup>259</sup> José Harris, "Political Thought and Social Policy: The Public and Private Spheres" in *The Mixed Economy of Social Welfare: Public/private Relations in England, Germany and the United States, the 1870s to the 1930s*, eds. Michael B. Katz and Christoph Sachße, (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1996), 60.

directs.”<sup>260</sup> This Hegelian understanding of charity and social welfare did not mesh in totality with the COS’s outlook on these same issues. As Harris argues, their apparent unawareness of Hegel’s views allowed them to praise his assessment of an interactive state while also protecting the sanctity of individualism.

Yet the COS’s operating philosophy was more complex than Hegel’s assertions as to the proper function of social welfare. While their tactics were overwhelmingly focused on individual self-improvement it was the role of other members of society within the realm of social welfare that was equally important to their operating principles. For this, idealists of the COS were influenced by the more classical ideas of Plato, which Harris argues was largely unsurprising given the prevalence of Classical studies within British universities at the time. For example, the notable COS proponent Bernard Bosanquet wrote on Plato’s ideas arguing that Plato’s concept of the statesman was influential for his vision of the social worker claiming that “both relied on “vision” rather than technical skill, and both were charged with “bringing the social mind into order, into harmony with itself.””<sup>261</sup> Other Idealist outlets such as *Progress. Civic, Social, and Industrial* the official journal of the British Social Service also looked to Plato’s writings of statesmanship and saw these ideas as a direct influence for viewing social work as an integral part of citizen responsibility.<sup>262</sup>

Idealism gained such widespread appeal and acceptance largely because it directly responded to the concerns and challenges of the Victorian and Edwardian period. By the mid-nineteenth century Britain’s earlier economic dominance was under direct threat by the fast

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<sup>260</sup> Harris, “Political Thought and Social Policy,” 60n33. Georg Friedrich Hegel, trans. T.M. Knox, *The Philosophy of Right*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 149.

<sup>261</sup> Harris, “Political Thought and Social Policy,” 62. Bernard Bosanquet, “The Meaning of Social Work,” *The International Journal of Ethics*, vol. XI (1900-1901), 294.

<sup>262</sup> Harris, “Political Thought and Social Policy,” 62.

industrializing German nation and the United States. Through the economic crises felt by British manufacturers in the 1860s as a result of the American Civil War and the global economic depression beginning in 1873, philosophers, reformers, and politicians understood that traditional approaches to these challenges would no longer be sufficient. In particular, questions arose around the reliance upon the traditional liberal philosophy of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) that advocated for a society in which individuals were free, personally and economically, from governmental influence. The arguments of other political philosophers who built upon Hobbes' ideas were also doubted. For example, they questioned the acceptance of ideas from thinkers like John Locke (1632-1704), Adam Smith (1723-1790), and Thomas Malthus (1766-1834), who argued for a society that severely restricted government intervention to enable individuals to be equal and free to pursue their own interests. While these ideas were important for early economic expansion within Britain, there were significant concerns as to whether the system that these ideas produced would be able to sustain itself in the midst of modernity's challenges. The work of idealists sought not to abandon these classical liberal principles in totality but transform its strict acceptance of restraining government involvement within the economy and society. Idealist philosophers asserted that in order to save the liberal socio-economic status-quo some government intervention was necessary as long as it was supporting the well-being of the community. British Idealists developed the idea of the "common-good" positing that the modern nation-state could not rely on a limited government to solve the problems created by a modern industrial society, chief among them were poverty and social distress.

Early Idealist thinkers used Britain's response in the earlier part of the nineteenth century to calls for political reform and expanded suffrage as an example to emulate when it came to the state getting involved in social issues. Just as Britain had adopted the Reform Act of 1832, which

moderately expanded suffrage for men, it was expansionist enough to stave off calls for more radical changes. The yielding of the establishment to this change helped maintain the political balance of power while also giving the impression that they were interested in demands for change. So too, according to Idealists, should the establishment begin to promote the common-good through greater activity within society and helping solve social problems without being too explicit or widespread in its involvement.

Viewing the state as a force of good, according to Idealists, helped individuals achieve their full potential within a laissez-faire system. Idealists were not afraid to call out the inherent problems within the capitalist system and its unequal nature. Yet this was muted in that they never sought to see this economic system replaced and still highly valued the role that individualism played within society. The willingness of Idealists to critique the capitalist system allowed them to find support amongst societies more radical elements of leftist liberals and even some socialists. As the problems brought on by industrialization demonstrated the growing and unchecked social problems of poverty, disease, over-crowded and unsanitary cities, and class-based antagonisms, the Idealist call to see the government intervene was attractive to political leftists. Many within society felt the same way, something needed to be done to help ensure individuals were capable of achieving self-determination regardless of the social factors present within society. As Robert Humphreys argues, “the negative role of the liberal state with its protection of individual freedoms was moved sensibly in the late Victorian decades to the restrained interventionism essential for its continuance.”<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Robert Humphreys, *Sin, Organized Charity and the Poor Law in Victorian England*, 2.

## **The British Charity Organisation Society and the Elberfeld System**

One of the benefits of Idealism was its ability to transcend far beyond the realms of philosophers and academics and to the real world of average individuals who saw the rapidly changing world around them and sought to reconcile those changes with understandings of how politics and the economy were to operate. These average individuals would go on to be volunteers in various reform movements, like the COS, or trained social workers, teachers, and church leaders. They became the vehicle through which the circulation of Idealist principles made it into application within society and urged greater calls for government involvement within the realm of social issues. The centralizing themes of the idealist philosophy, such as citizenship and communal responsibility, became a hallmark for the middle-classes within Britain who found within the ideological framework an avenue for active participation within their society.<sup>264</sup>

It is through the work of philosopher Bernard Bosanquet (1848-1923) and his wife Helen (1860-1926) which helped influence the COS to operate under Idealist principles. Bernard's half-brother, Charles Bertie Pulleine Bosanquet (1834-1905) was one of the earliest advocates for the COS and became the first salaried Secretary of the organization.<sup>265</sup> It was through this connection that Bernard would find an avenue of implanting his ideas and practicing social work. Bernard was educated at Balliol College, Oxford and was a student of Idealist philosopher Thomas Hill Green. After completing his degree, Bernard remained as a Fellow at the university until 1881 when he moved to London to write and work for the COS more directly. It was while working in London that he met his wife Helen who was educated at Newnham College and became one of the earliest women to receive honors in the moral sciences. Bernard's time at Oxford played a significant role in his development as an idealist philosopher along with forming his friendship with Charles S.

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<sup>264</sup> Harris, "Political Thought and Social Policy," 70-71.

<sup>265</sup> Robert Humphreys, *Poor Relief and Charity, 1869-1945: The London Charity Organisation Society*, (2001), 21.

Loch (1849-1923), who would go on to become the most influential COS Secretary and it was through this relationship that would bring the two to work together at the COS in London. Unlike his friend Loch, Bernard's main role within the COS was primarily "that of committee man, counsellor, and theorist rather than that of active social worker."<sup>266</sup> It seems that for all the support Bernard would have for individualized casework and relationship building with the poor taken from the Elberfeld System and implemented through the COS's program he "found direct contact with the poor embarrassing."<sup>267</sup>

Traditional scholarship on the COS and its operating principles has argued that the organization was a bulwark of individualism and did not favor government involvement within the realm of welfare.<sup>268</sup> However this association has been questioned by other scholars who look more directly at the words of COS leaders like those of the Bosanquets and Charles Loch. Andrew Vincent and Raymond Plant in their work *Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship: The Life and Thought of the British Idealists* (1984) contend that the COS was never wholly individualistic. In fact, the COS began in the late 1860s as a response to too much individual, and as they saw it indiscriminate, giving to the poor by the well-to-do with London. The COS wanted to curb the desires of the individual in order to better facilitate meeting the needs of the impoverished. They also believed that unconstrained individualized relief efforts encouraged greater pauperization amongst London's poor. The individual character of the poor themselves was important for COS practitioners but "the idea that poverty was due to character deficiency seems to be but a half-truth,

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<sup>266</sup> A. M. McBriar, "Bosanquet, Bernard" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, eds. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-31974?rskey=EUIyX7&result=2>

<sup>267</sup> A. M. McBriar, "Bosanquet, Bernard."

<sup>268</sup> See Asa Briggs, *Social Thought and Social Action: A Study of the Work of Seebohm Rowntree, 1871-1954*, (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1974); Bentley B. Gilbert, *The Evolution of National Insurance: The Origins of the Welfare State*, (Aldershot: Gregg Revivals, 1993); David Owen, *English Philanthropy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).

as regards the COS.” Instead the connotation of deserving and undeserving poor in relation to individual character was a common trope but the COS saw poverty resulting from “character deficiency” in “only some” of the cases they dealt with.<sup>269</sup>

The other assertion made by some scholars was that the COS was averse to government involvement within the realm of social issues. This too is an oversimplification of COS rhetoric and their attraction to and adoption of Elberfeld principles demonstrates a more complex understanding within the relationship between public and private. Looking at the writings of the Bosanquets and Charles Loch it is evident that their understanding of the state was not one of separation between the public and private realms but rather the state had the responsibility to intervene within the private realm when it strengthened the community in total or strengthened the corporate communal ties of individuals within that community. This fit nicely within Idealist philosophy which lauded a sense of communal accountability. According to José Harris, “the Bosanquets’ vision of social welfare” was not understood as “an end in itself but as a means to an end – the end of fostering and enhancing the ethical rationality which alone could qualify individuals for a passport to citizenship of the virtuous republic. Thus, it was not the material fact of a social welfare benefit that was important, but its inner meaning and context. A benefit was allowable (even a state benefit) if it took place within an ethical context (i.e. a reciprocal personal relationship between giver and receiver) and if its end was rational (i.e. promotion of independent citizenship of the recipient). It was allowable if it strengthened the sense of corporate community. But it was not allowable, either from the state or from private charity, if it involved a mere mechanical and anonymous transfer of resources from one individual to another, with no element of moral purpose or ethical exchange.” Harris brings this portrait of the Bosanquets vision of social

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<sup>269</sup> Andrew Vincent and Raymond Plant, *Philosophy, Politics, and Citizenship: The Life and Thought of the British Idealists*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 98. C.S. Loch, *Charity Organisation*, (London, 1905), 105.



reform to completion when affirming that their goal as reformers “was not to keep the poor in their place, but to force the poor into active and prudent participatory citizenship.”<sup>270</sup>

The writings of Charles Loch on the COS articulated a similar viewpoint on the role between public and private and citizenship participation within poor relief. He stated, “It is more than ever the interest of the State to prevent the existence of a class so poor as to be on the verge of dependence, or actually in receipt of poor relief. Pauperism is the social enemy of the modern State. The state wants citizens. It cannot afford to have any outcast or excluded classes, citizens that are not citizens...It must do its utmost to change the dependent sections of the community into independent...Accordingly it becomes a duty of the State by some means to prevent pauperism, and of its citizens to give their service to the State for that purpose.”<sup>271</sup> Loch would go on to emphasize that the role this new approach to charity could have would only succeed with the support of fellow citizens caring for those in need within their community. “The new charity requires of the rich that, for the common good, they submit to the common yoke of labour, and that they help the poor to become self-dependent and competent fellow-citizens...The new charity does not seek material ends, but to create a better social and individual life.”<sup>272</sup>

The emphasis on citizenship, communal responsibility, and the ethical context of how relief should be given, demonstrates why COS leaders were drawn to the Elberfeld System. At its core, the Elberfeld System’s ideology operated under mobilizing individual citizens to learn about their neighbors and know their condition by serving as poor guardians in order to protect the common weal of society. Admirers of the System asserted “the generous citizen of Elberfeld has never been

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<sup>270</sup> Harris, “Political Thought and Social Policy,” 65. Bernard Bosanquet, *Philosophical Theory of the State*, (London: Macmillan, 1899), 296-334.

<sup>271</sup> Loch, *Charity Organization*, 4.

<sup>272</sup> Loch, *Charity Organization*, 6.

in the back ground when he was required to succour distress and misery.”<sup>273</sup> This mobilization was made obligatory by the members of that community deciding the service to their fellow members was an expectation of citizenship within that society and that failing to participate would render consequences that limited an individual’s ability to take part (i.e. suffrage restrictions). While the work of Vincent, Plant, and Harris help to challenge traditional understandings of the COS’s relationship to Idealism and their application of these principles, it is not until these ideas are taken a step further and put within a larger transnational context that demonstrates what drew the COS into organizing their reform movement under Elberfeld principles.

As Idealism undergirded the COS’s organizing philosophy, its manifestation in 1869 came in direct response to the crisis of the 1860s and the perceived haphazard and unchecked aid given to the poor. The emergence of the COS was not a unique phenomenon in the late 1860s as it was a period in which a host of likeminded charities and reform-oriented groups came onto the scene. The earliest supporters of the COS operating framework were met with apathetic responses from other charities and reformers of the day. However, it succeeded in securing the support of a group of well-to-do gentlemen in London who were aided, both financially and with name notoriety, by the Church of England, nobles, and even royalty. For example, the first financial backer of the COS was the Earl of Lichfield, Thomas George Anson (1825-1892) and the Bishop of London was listed as President. These connections brought other socially prominent figures including Queen Victoria who was listed in the annual donations list of having given fifty pounds in 1871 and named patron of the group in 1872.<sup>274</sup> It would continue to attract nobles, members of the clergy, and gentlemen over the years always having their names listed in the COS’s annual reports.

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<sup>273</sup> W. Grisewood, A.F. Hanewinkel, *Jubilee Celebrations of the Elberfeld Poor Law*, (Liverpool: D. Marples & Co., 1903) 6.

<sup>274</sup> A/FWA/C/B/01/001: COS Annual Reports (Nos. 1-10) January 1869-December 1878; First Annual Report; 1870; Second Annual Report; 1871; Third Annual Report; 1872 (London Metropolitan Archive).

The attraction of influential figures was the *modus operandi* of each COS branch. It functioned as a mutually beneficial situation for both groups. The COS's leaders understood the advantage of being associated with the wealth and reputation of these figures, whereas the wealthy saw it as important to be seen doing something about the major social problems of the day. They believed it was their responsibility, as a result of their economic and social status, to help the impoverished by investigating their condition in order to provide the proper guidance to raise them out of their condition. The continuous attraction of the well-to-do gave the organization an air of elitism being described by the Sidney and Beatrice Webb (1859-1947; 1858-1943) as "the most exclusive of sects."<sup>275</sup>

Despite the efforts of individuals like William Rathbone (1819-1902), who funded Andrew Doyle's trip to Germany to try and convince Parliament to overhaul the Poor Law into an Elberfeld type structure, the COS did not seek to abolish the British Poor Law system. Rather they hoped to make it more efficient and work in harmony with the Poor Law authorities and other private charities. There was particular frustration targeted toward the existing Poor Law authorities by COS leaders. C.B.P. Bosanquet argued that based upon the current structure of the Poor Law, the guardians who were supposed to be overseeing the poor were by "nature of their duties...necessarily guardians of the rates rather than guardians of the poor. No one goes to the metropolitan guardians for advice about any charitable scheme, or looks on them as specially interested in the welfare of individual poor persons...they do little or nothing to *prevent* pauperism, or to raise up those who have fallen into it."<sup>276</sup> Bosanquet charged the Poor Law Board of doing

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<sup>275</sup> Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *English Local Government, English Poor Law History. Part II: The Last Hundred Years, volume 1*, (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1906-1929), 456.

<sup>276</sup> Charles Bertie P. Bosanquet, *London: some account of its growth, charitable agencies and wants*, 197. Italics in original.

little to solve the problem of poverty and that this was exacerbated by the fact that the guardians in various unions were overwhelmed by the number of those requesting help. He stated,

Look at the duties of a relieving officer in a London union. The union contains several thousand poor families, and hundreds of persons come to him during the week to ask for out-door relief...He gives bread or other relief to urgent cases at once; in some unions all out-door cases are left to his discretion, in others all cases come before the Board, but the Guardians are everywhere in great measure guided by his advice in their grants, and sometimes dispose of the applications made to them at the rate of two or three a minute. He knows very little of the character and antecedents of many of the applicants, and has but a superficial knowledge of their present circumstances, but he knows the character of the different parts of his district well, and has had much experience of the poor. Under these circumstances, however conscientious a man may be, he will necessarily go too much by general rules. He will refuse a deserving applicant, or at most will only allow her two or three loaves a week (which she may have to come some distance to fetch), because she lives in a poor neighborhood, and he fears that if he did more for her we would be persecuted by her neighbours; whilst he will give money to another, upon whom as those who had known her longer could tell him, such relief would be thrown away.<sup>277</sup>

The lack of knowledge on the part of the poor guardians and the overwhelming number of requests for aid made a difficult job even harder and the consequences, according to Bosanquet, increased pauperization.

There were some attempts from various municipalities within England, such as Macclesfield, who experimented with the possibility of adopting the Elberfeld structure. In 1872 it was determined by the Local Government Board to be an area “best suited” and moved forward with enlisting “a corps of 100 volunteer assistant guardians” to help the paid Poor Law guardians. There seem to be some initial success with the number of those requesting aid dropping, although the local newspaper claimed it was the result of an “increase in trade.”<sup>278</sup> There seemed to be positive reaction to the greater inclusion of both parents and children in contributing to the family

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<sup>277</sup> Charles Bertie P. Bosanquet, *London: some account of its growth, charitable agencies and wants*, 197-198.

<sup>278</sup> This example is cited in Robert Humphreys, *Poor Relief and Charity, 1869-1945: The London Charity Organisation Society*, (2001), 17-18. See also *Charity Organisation Reporter*, (March 27, 1872), 63; *Charity Organisation Reporter*, (November 13, 1872), 167; *Charity Organisation Reporter*, (December 11, 1872), 188.

economy something that the Clerk of the Macclesfield guardians claimed had reached a level “never before known.” However, issues arose quickly after the experimentation period began. It became increasingly difficult to find enough willing volunteers to give their time to serve as assistant guardians. There were also complaints made by the poor themselves. Complaints were registered by Joseph Chapman who was the Secretary of the local Silk Weavers’ Association and “provided details of three cases claiming that each had been treated unfairly” indicating that they resisted either the invasive questioning or were angered by the determination of being unworthy of relief.<sup>279</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, since the COS tried to avoid admitting to negative comments on their approach to relief, the COS responded to Chapman’s claims as “fair criticism” but also found it unfortunate that he and “others of his class did not accede to the urgent appeal made to them to become assistant-guardians.”<sup>280</sup> This too was a common tactic of the COS, to derisively call out those who chose not to participate in their scheme as contributing to the problem through their critiques rather than being part of the solution. In all, the Macclesfield experiment with Elberfeld was short-lived.

In trying to work with the Poor Law Board rather than abolish it or bypass it, the COS gained significant momentum just a few months after it formed when in the Local Government Board came out in support of COS endeavors. The Local Government Board encouraged charities throughout London and Great Britain to work with the COS as it sought to efficiently organize the myriad of philanthropic activities.<sup>281</sup> The COS wanted to be known as a centralizing agency for other charities, helping to streamline the work of other groups. This meant that most of their activities were directing those in need of aid to the appropriate organization rather than doling out

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<sup>279</sup> Humphreys, *Poor Relief and Charity*, 17-18.

<sup>280</sup> Humphreys, *Poor Relief and Charity*, 17-18.

aid themselves. Through the COS's investigative efforts, they would determine who was deserving and undeserving of help. If deserving, the poor would be sent to whatever charity could most fit their needs while those who were designated as undeserving would be sent to Poor Law authorities.

The relationship between the COS movement and the Elberfeld System was one of admiration, consistent investigation, and imitation. As awareness of the System spread throughout England thanks to the work of reform minded individuals, like William Rathbone, who was able to convince Parliament to send its first investigative trip to Germany in 1871. While Rathbone was unsuccessful in convincing Parliament to overhaul its poor relief structure in the image of the Elberfeld System, he found willing reformers eager to adopt what they saw as an enlightened form of charity. Through the publication of Andrew Doyle's findings during his initial visit it opened up a much wider network of readers to the inter-workings of German poor relief. When the connection became known between Elberfeld and Dr. Thomas Chalmers' (1780-1847) reforms in Glasgow earlier in the century interest grew even more. In writings and speeches, it was not uncommon to make reference to the similarities that the Elberfeld System had with Chalmers' reforms.<sup>282</sup> This gave a boost to the idea that there already existed a relationship between these two locations on how best to approach solutions to social problems.

Doyle's investigative missions was but one attempt by Rathbone to see more official adoption of Elberfeld principles within England. He supported a following trip in 1887 led by J.S. Davy, a Local Government Board inspector, accompanied by Charles Loch and A.F. Hanewinkel, who helped lead the Liverpool Central Relief Society. Rathbone wanted this follow-up investigation to take place because he argued that the Elberfeld System had expanded to many

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<sup>282</sup> See FWA 80: *The Elberfeld System and its adaptation in Glasgow*, May 1911 (London Senate House Library), FWA 64: *The Elberfeld System : ... a lecture delivered in West Coates Parish Church, 17th March 1907*. Lamond, John. (London Senate House Library).

other German cities in the last fifteen years and any evolution of the system would be of notable interest to all parties involved. What made Rathbone such an ardent supporter of the Elberfeld System was the individualized investigation poor guardians carried out with the poor. Historian Robert Humphreys has argued that Rathbone's interest in Elberfeld was based upon an assumption of the System that was "dubious" and that Rathbone seemed to focus on the relationship building between the poor guardian and the impoverished as one of sympathetic friendship. Humphreys goes on to bring up critiques of the relationship building central to the Elberfeld System by referring to Doyle's description of the excruciating examination made into the lives of the poor and that it was not one that individuals would actively seek out.<sup>283</sup> It seems, however, that Humphreys argument is made without fully considering the context of the Elberfeld System within its city of origin. The Elberfeld System and its progenitors did not see personal relationships as being something that existed without significant discipline. The System's founders viewed the relationship between a socially better poor guardian and the lesser pauper as an unequal or hierarchical relationship. One in which the middle- or upper-class poor guardian took on the relationship to know, but more importantly, instruct the poor on how to eliminate their situation. They saw this relationship as inherently sympathetic but also not without discipline. The envisioned relationship between poor guardian and the poor was to reflect a Biblical understanding that love and discipline were mutually beneficial. They found this justification in scripture affirming that just as the Lord disciplines those he loves, so too does the poor guardian discipline those they have accepted responsibility for.<sup>284</sup> When viewed in this way it is possible for Rathbone, and others like him, to fully reconcile the harsh and discipling nature of the personal relationship

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<sup>283</sup> Robert Humphreys, *Sin, Organized Charity, and the Poor Law*, 59.

<sup>284</sup> See Hebrews 12:6; Deuteronomy 8:5; Psalm 94:12; Proverbs 3:12; Revelation 3:19.

between guardians and the poor because they do not see these ideas as mutually exclusive but rather mutually beneficial for solving the social problem of poverty.

The investigative trips funded by Rathbone did more than just introduce a wider British awareness to the Elberfeld System, it also illuminated leaders of the COS to the many publications and writings made by the city's facilitators. These writings became like a guidebook for COS leaders to read and adopt the techniques of district organization, how to facilitate weekly or monthly meetings of the group, and even how to instruct friendly visitors to carry out proper investigations into the poor. The COS library included copies of the Annual Reports for the municipal poor relief administration (*Jahres-Bericht Elberfeld Städtische Armen-Verwaltung*) to copies of the official poor law order (*Armenordnung für die Stadt Elberfeld*) and its various updates throughout the latter nineteenth century.

Information on surveillance and its techniques was then introduced to a wider audience through the various publications that the COS had at their disposal. These publications included the *Charity Organisation Review* which functioned as the annual journal for articles and speeches recounting the work the COS was undertaking throughout Great Britain. Another key publication was the *Charity Organisation Reporter* which was a weekly publication that "laid no claim to being a newspaper but served as the propagandist mouthpiece of the Charity Organisation Society."<sup>285</sup> Each of these publications included a detailed explanations of the Elberfeld System, how it worked in application in Germany, and what could be of use to the COS's operation. More frequently, however, were simple references to Elberfeld without any additional details provided. This indicates that the Elberfeld System was such a frequent topic of conversation that an awareness was already deeply saturated and further explanation was unnecessary. The mere

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<sup>285</sup> Humphreys *Poor Relief and Charity*, 34.



reference to Elberfeld and its poor relief efforts immediately conjured up images of personal relationships built with the poor, the reliance on poor guardians to carry out the investigative measures, and the understanding of poor relief as a responsibility of citizenship. It is fair to say that for those who operated within the COS realm they were equally aware with the German system as they were with their own Poor Law.

The element of the Elberfeld System that garnered so much attention to COS social reformers was the thoroughness that the German poor guardians took to know and understand the conditions of the poor and their need of relief. As the COS operated under the basic principles of the Elberfeld ideology it sought to take the system's organization methods, its personal investigation into the lives of the poor and implement them within their private society. In one of its publications the COS stated that in order to properly know the poor "we must have some knowledge of how they live, how they think, and how they act; the nature of their dwellings, the rents they pay, the shops they deal at, goods they buy." These were "all worth considering" if the COS was to undertake a similar mission to that of the Elberfeld System.<sup>286</sup> Octavia Hill (1838-1912), a notable social reformer and considered a founder of modern social work, was a significant part of the COS's creation. Drawn to the principles of the Elberfeld System, she stated "I feel most deeply that the disciplining of our immense poor population must be effected by individual influence; and that this power can change it from a mob of paupers and semi-paupers into a body of self-dependent workers."<sup>287</sup>

While German law enabled cities to require *Armenpfleger* participation with the threat of suffrage restrictions or increased taxes, British reformers were enamored with this principle but knew how difficult it would be to implement. Therefore, the COS operated knowing that their

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<sup>286</sup> A/FWA/C/H/6/036: Occasional Papers of the COS; 1896; "How to Take Down A Case," 209-210.

<sup>287</sup> Octavia Hill, *Homes of the London Poor*, (London: MacMillan and Co., 1875), 33.

participation would come from volunteers. Charles Loch emphasized that just as in Germany “personal responsibility would be the key-note of the system” but this would not be “a responsibility girded and supported by law. It would be a responsibility girded by education and conscience, and by the consciousness that great issues are involved when one attempts to influence and modify the lives of other persons.”<sup>288</sup> The COS created the role of ‘friendly visitor’ which operated the job of the poor guardian to oversee indigent families, teach them values of hard work and thriftiness, refer them to the appropriate charity or Local Government Board, and in some cases, provide relief. They established elaborate systems of centralized records and administrative services to keep tabs on those who were receiving outdoor relief and adopted techniques to ensure that its visitors were upholding professional social work standards. However, the COS also knew that these friendly visitors needed guidance on how to carry out these principles. Publishing guidebooks and offering trainings were functions of each COS district to ensure a uniform practice of investigative techniques. In its paper “How To Take Down a Case” the COS stated that the manual was needed for new workers who “have a tendency to accept off-hand what is said to them without stopping to verify it. Yet experience shows that the case-taker and the applicant may mean very different things by the same form of words. Still, in trying to avoid the Scylla of ambiguity, it is possible to fall into the Charybdis of over-minuteness; and it is well to recognise that both are serious mistakes...beginners are more apt to under-estimate what is necessary than to over-estimate it.”<sup>289</sup>

Finding individuals willing to give their time as volunteers and requiring the building of personal relationships with the poor in order to best meet their needs was a monumental task. The

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<sup>288</sup> A/FWA/C/H/06/009; The COS Review Volume XV, 1904, “The London Charity Organisation Society, The Elberfeld System,” pg. 159-166; 165.

<sup>289</sup> “How to Take Down A Case”; 209-220. The reference to Scylla and Charybdis is an idiom deriving from Homer’s *Odyssey* in Greek mythology, meaning having to choose between two evils.

steady supply of volunteers became a chronic problem for COS officials, which had to have surprised them. There seemed to be a belief amongst most reformers that hordes of volunteers from Britain's middle- and upper-classes would willingly join the ranks of the COS as if it was within an innate character to do so. It seemed to be supported by the efforts of individuals who were giving indiscriminately to other charities in the 1860s and the COS interpreted this as proof of a desire to get involved. However, a desire by London's elite to give money or materials to those in need was vastly different than asking individuals to dedicate hours of their week or month engaging in the required investigative activity the COS expected. While the COS boasted having the support of society's most notable figures, who willingly allowed their names to be published indicating how much they gave and accepted their honorary role as 'vice-president,' this did not mean that these individuals were serving as friendly visitors. Given that Elberfeld could claim that their roles had individuals dedicating a quarter- to a half-century of their lives serving as poor guardians this was because of its direct relationship with requirements of German citizenship. Without this obligation it is doubtful as to whether the number of individuals serving in this position or for the length of time would be so high. This is evidenced by the fact that other larger urban areas in Germany, like Berlin and Dresden, had moved away from relying on volunteers and instead on paid positions because the task had grown so large that it was unmanageable for volunteers who had their own responsibilities. This proved to be true with the early experiment at Macclesfield leading to its abandonment soon after starting.

### **Women and the Charity Organisation Society**

The need for volunteers enabled the COS to utilize the work of women within their organization. Women took a more active role serving as both key members of COS leadership, from its very beginning, and as friendly visitors. Notable figures such as Helen Bosanquet and

Octavia Hill were founding members and took on active roles in gaining members and training volunteers on how to carry out COS principles. The role of friendly visitors took on a new dynamic within the British context. In Germany, these roles were relegated strictly to men who were understood as fulfilling a responsibility of citizenship. In Elberfeld, women who served with the *Frauenverein* were originally used only as an additional resource available to the city's poor. Early investigative reports made by British reformers made sure to include comments on how women in the city fit within the poor relief structure demonstrating the interest this would create amongst the report's readers. While Poor Law guardians remained largely male dominated during the nineteenth century the COS saw women's involvement as an opportunity to take advantage of a group who had more free-time than their husbands or other male counterparts while also assuming a role that seemed in line with the 'natural' abilities of care and nurture.<sup>290</sup> This was not exactly new terrain for women, as many upper-class women had taken on the responsibility of caring for their community's poor in previous centuries. This was primarily regulated to visiting the homes of those in need, when need was largely due to sickness, old age, or some form of disability for members of a family. Women's visiting of the poor came through bringing food or other relief in kind to these families. The main difference between this earlier form of visiting was its relative limitation unlike the rampant poverty strangling the urban centers of Great Britain. The main similarity, however, was women were still viewed, as argued by Octavia Hill, as particularly suited for the roles of friendly visitor. In her treatise on district visiting Hill affirmed, "Depend upon it, if we thought of the poor primarily as husbands, wives, sons, and daughters, members of households, as we are ourselves, instead of contemplating them as a different class, we should

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<sup>290</sup> In 1875 Martha Merington was the first woman to be elected as a Poor Law Guardian in Britain. She had been serving as the Secretary at the Kensington District Committee of the Charity Organisation Society. This role inevitably gave her experience and notoriety within her Poor Law union to feel qualified to be elected for this role.

recognise better how the hours trailing and high ideal of home duty was out best preparation for work among them.”<sup>291</sup> Utilizing their places within society as wives and mothers, along with their social class, women “were the foot soldiers in the Victorian attack upon destitution and pauperism.”<sup>292</sup>

The move towards utilizing women in the COS worked in tandem with greater changes women experienced within society. Opportunities for education meant that many women could either pursue greater educational training in social work or put newly acquired knowledge into practice. The development of social work as both an idea and vocation held a deep association with the women’s movement developing in the late nineteenth century. Many of the policies of social work focused on women and were carried out by women. The participation of middle-class women in educating lower-class women through the avenues of the women’s movement demonstrates the changes in perception held toward poverty and its effects. The use of biology in promoting hygiene, higher birth rates, and better nutrition all came back to focus on the family. For social workers, the family needed greater regulation and support to construct a better society to end poverty and its problems. “Since women’s bodies were at the center of the family, the war on poverty focused on them. The politics of social welfare reform reflected the desire of reformers to protect mothers, children, and the family in the context of related national concerns.”<sup>293</sup> Policies for women did not stop at poor relief but also included a host of maternalist policies such as improving mother and infant hygiene, proper education in breastfeeding, and proper nutrition.

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<sup>291</sup> Octavia Hill, *District Visiting*, (London, 1877), 6.

<sup>292</sup> Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948*, 269.

<sup>293</sup> Rachel Fuchs, *Gender and Poverty in Nineteenth Century Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 211.

## Critiques and Limits of the Charity Organisation Society

For all the efforts the COS put forth in trying to reform and better facilitate the Poor Law system through the oversight of private charity, it was not without significant criticism. For many of those critiques the COS tried to address them head on, writing about them in their annual reports. Unsurprisingly, the COS couched their responses to critiques as a way to call out a lack of awareness among the public for not fully understanding their activities. For example, many critiqued the organization for inquiring too much into the lives of those applying for relief. The COS report retorted by saying “It may well be doubted whether those who object to our inquiries know two things: first, the amount not only of flagrant imposture, but of unmanly shiftless dependence, which spread like a murrain where inquiry is dispensed with; and next, the difficulty there is in really helping the poor man in his poverty, not merely assuaging some temporary smart and leaving him as he is.”<sup>294</sup> Furthermore, the COS’s response was that inquiry was at the center of their mission and that to lessen the inquiry would be to allow pauperism to flourish and potentially allow those of poor character to receive aid when they are undeserving. They stated, “Is it right, or even polite, to subsidise vice and hypocrisy, or to make the path smoother for those who are travelling towards them? Yet this is what those unquestionably do, and cannot avoid doing, who give relief without full previous inquiry.”<sup>295</sup> The COS claimed that inquiry was necessary given the responsibility they had as a charity claiming, “How much less can a Society, which is the trustee of other people’s money, and the adviser of other people’s charity, venture to act without full inquiry when it dispenses or advises?”<sup>296</sup> Since the COS assumed the responsibility of other people’s funds it must be inquisitive into the lives of those needing aid in order to maintain

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<sup>294</sup> A/FWA/C/B/01/005: COS Annual Report (No 23-27) October 1890-September 1895; “Twenty-Third Annual Report, April 1892,” 4.

<sup>295</sup> “Twenty-Third Annual Report, April 1892,” 4.

<sup>296</sup> “Twenty-Third Annual Report, April 1892,” 4.

the public trust. With the seemingly excessive inquisition into the poor also came criticism of being “cold-blooded and critical.” They openly affirmed being critical, calling it their “*raison d’être*” and seeing this as sustaining their responsibilities with the poor. They saw their criticism as in the public interest claiming that “Were ours a do-nothing society its criticism might seem out of place, but it only lives by action. It preaches not less, or less devoted effort, but more, and still more. It has a conviction and reasoned principles being it, and whilst it generally desires the same ends as to those whom it criticises...it has earned a right to be listened to, when it weighs and tests the means by which they propose to reach them.”<sup>297</sup> The COS did, however, challenge the assertion that they were cold-blooded. They claimed that they had been misunderstood and that keeping a “cool-head in an age of sensationalism” was not the same as being cold-blooded. They affirmed, “To endeavour to keep the head cool and to see things as they are, even in the presence of misery, is not to be cold-blooded.”<sup>298</sup>

Another common critique came from claiming there were delays in providing relief from the time someone either reached out directly to the district branch of the COS or were referred to them for help. The COS pushed back on this saying that if members of the society are strongly convicted that a case was worthy of immediate aid, then it is given. They did not deny that delays were a reality but argued that they kept them as short as possible. They largely blamed this on factors beyond their control saying “Consider the vastness of London; the frequent shiftings of abode which the poor are often forced to make; the recent structural changes, in many quarters, which make whole neighborhoods undecipherable to the inquirer; the difficult in getting prompt answers to letters; the time required for securing a personal interview which referee or employer,

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<sup>297</sup> “Twenty-Third Annual Report, April 1892,” 6-7.

<sup>298</sup> “Twenty-Third Annual Report, April 1892,” 6.

and for visiting the home; and you will grant that much which looks like delay is really unavoidable.”<sup>299</sup>

One of the more serious claims against the COS targeted their use of funds and the high cost of running the Organisation. The misuse of funds critique focused on spending too much on offices and salaries and not enough for the poor they were supposed to be aiding. The response by the COS to this critique was unexpected. They asserted that the funds raised for the organization were not raised to be given out directly to the poor but for the running of their administrative efforts. This seems unexpected given that many assumed that the COS’s responsibility was to provide direct relief to the poor, but as with their response with many other critiques, the COS said this assumption misunderstood their purposes. They said, “Whenever, as sometimes happens, any portion of the money which should go to the support of our whole organization is diverted to relief, we regard this as a misfortune, and a defect in the practical working of our system.” They followed this up with clarifying any claims that the funds the COS received earmarked specifically for the use of direct aid were always used for that purpose and anything else was “an absolutely groundless objection.”<sup>300</sup>

Critiques also came from other social reformers and organizations who demonstrated their displeasure with COS influence through the publication of pamphlets or books and gave speeches calling out what they saw as flaws within COS ideology. One reformer who took issue with the COS was William Booth (1829-1912) who was a Methodist preacher and founder of the Salvation Army. The Salvation Army was the opposite of the COS in almost every respect and prided itself for being so. They openly gave to those in need in the London’s East End and argued that their generosity “wholly offset” the “strict policies” of the COS. Booth wrote his own defense of the

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<sup>299</sup> “Twenty-Third Annual Report, April 1892,” 5.

<sup>300</sup> “Twenty-Third Annual Report, April 1892,” 5.



Salvation Army and its tactics in *In Darkest England, and the Way Out* (1890) where he “publicized and attempted to justify the Army’s methods of helping without asking questions.”<sup>301</sup> Bernard Bosanquet responded to Booth’s publication by writing his own pamphlet called *‘In Darkest England’ on the Wrong Track* (1891) saying that “Your Lifeboat Brigade” referring to the Army’s indiscriminate giving “are really wreckers in disguise, who decoy ships on the rocks by false lights!”<sup>302</sup> Historian A.M. McBriar argues that this division between Booth and Bosanquet came primarily from different interpretations on what was the proper role of Christian charity.<sup>303</sup> Other critics came from social reformers to political economists like Charles Booth (1840-1916), John A. Hobson (1858-1940), and Leonard T. Hobhouse (1864-1929) all calling out what they saw as flawed practices in COS ideology.

Some of the strongest and best organized attacks against the COS came from Sidney and Beatrice Webb and the Fabian Society (1884). Interestingly the antagonism between these organizations and individuals was not immediate. In the early 1880s, Beatrice Webb was not only a member of the COS but actively worked as a friendly visitor in London’s East End and seemed to fully embrace the ideology undergirding COS practices. She wrote an article for the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1886 entitled “A Lady’s View of the Unemployed in the East End” in which she “expressed impeccable orthodox COS opinions.”<sup>304</sup> She was lured away from the COS when Charles Booth asked her to help with his survey of the poor for this work *Life and Labour and the People of London* (1889). It was under his tutelage that she began to question COS principles while never fully breaking ties with those in the organization. The more significant break came when

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<sup>301</sup> A.M. McBriar, *An Edwardian Mixed Doubles: The Bosanquets versus The Webbs, A Study in British Social Policy, 1890-1929*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 60.

<sup>302</sup> Bernard Bosanquet, *‘In Darkest England’ on the Wrong Track*, (London, 1891), 33.

<sup>303</sup> McBriar, *An Edwardian Mixed Doubles*, 61.

<sup>304</sup> McBriar, *An Edwardian Mixed Doubles*, 109.

Beatrice began work with the Fabian Society, a socialist group, where she would meet her future husband Sidney, who was himself a committed social reformer. The divisions between the two groups were also personified with the differences in ideology between the Webbs and Bernard and Helen Bosanquet. By the early twentieth century, calls for greater reform to the Poor Laws within Britain caused the two couples and the groups they represented to take differing views on how the Poor Law should proceed. In 1905 Parliament established the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress to investigate the ways the Poor Law needed to be reformed. The commission had within its ranks members of the Poor Law Board but also the major leaders of the COS including Octavia Hill, Helen Bosanquet, and Charles Loch and from the Fabian Society, Beatrice Webb.

The investigation took four years with no consensus reached by the commissioners. Rather they produced two reports demonstrating the division on how poor relief in Britain should proceed. The *Minority Report* was supported by the Fabians and largely written by Beatrice Webb. Through her investigations she could not support the findings made in what became known as the *Majority Report* supported by the COS members of the Commission. In the aftermath of the Commission the division between the ideas regarding poverty seemed more definitive than ever. The *Majority Report* asserted that poverty was the result of individual failings and that the Poor Law should remain in place with significant oversight needed to the ways in which Poor Guardians were managing their cases, very similar to the same critique that the COS held against the Poor Law Boards in the 1860s. The report echoed earlier calls by the COS in stating that Poor Guardians were still providing too much outdoor relief. In contrast, the Webbs in the *Minority Report* argued that poverty was caused not due to moral failings but rather structural forces outside the individual's control. Despite the efforts of Beatrice and Sidney Webb their ideas did not come to

full fruition, at least in the short-term. In the long-term the arguments and assertions for change to poor relief articulated in the *Minority Report* were an important precursor to welfare state development in post-World War II Britain. In fact, William Beveridge (1879-1963) who is associated with providing the blue-print for Britain's post-war welfare system, was a researcher for the Webbs in writing the *Minority Report*.

Despite the critiques that came against the COS and its leaders, the organization continued to garner the support, both financially and with name notoriety, from a host of Britain's elite. Whether or not this support was reflected with other social reformers or with the poor themselves is not as clear. Regardless, the COS had widespread influence in that its principles and organizational methods were adopted throughout the Empire and found particularly fertile ground in the United States. The United States' relationship to the Elberfeld System was not as close as its British counterpart. The U.S. would never send investigative missions to glean from Elberfeld what could be brought back and applied at home. Yet that did not mean that the impact was any less. Rather the Elberfeld System was studied from afar, referenced in American COS writing materials and speeches, and understood by COS adherents as the basis for their own poor relief efforts.

## Chapter Five: A Charity Clearing House: The American Charity Organization Society and the Elberfeld System

The United States has a tumultuous relationship to poverty and social welfare. It is often believed that the U.S. either has no public welfare system or that relief to those in need has been the work of private institutions and individuals. This assumption produces a false image of poverty in the U.S. as un-natural to the unique American life. The myth of the un-American nature of poverty was supported through the natural landscape of the nation offering land and opportunity to its earliest settlers. Colonists asserted the fundamentally foreign nature of poverty when looking at the communities of Native Americans. English colonial leader Roger Williams claimed, when writing about the natives of the New England region, that there were “no beggars among them.”<sup>305</sup> For much of the nation’s early history poverty was the result of life’s natural progressions through old age, sickness, or disability. In the early years of the republic, it was believed that America always had enough work for those who wanted it. It was only those who were naturally work-shy who suffered from unemployment and spent a life begging. Even foreigners traveling to the U.S., such as famed Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville, believed that poverty did not exist or if it did it was only in small numbers. While de Tocqueville’s interpretation of American life was based on its democratic foundation, the image that he and others proclaimed encouraged the myth of America’s lack of economic inequality and therefore its presence as inherently un-American.<sup>306</sup>

Accompanying the myth of poverty’s absence in the U.S. was also the belief that America naturally provided a means by which to avoid any buildup of impoverished individuals in the urban areas through what became known as the ‘safety-valve’ of the West. Best articulated in the work of Frederick Jackson Turner, it was believed by contemporaries in the nineteenth century that the

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<sup>305</sup> Edwin S. Gaustad, *Roger Williams*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>306</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, (1835).

plentiful supply of land in the West functioned as a viable alternative to avoid issues of class conflict and urban poverty by sending those individuals to inhabit the land and fashion them into agrarian laborers like Jefferson had envisioned for the republic. By the 1840s this image of the West as a safety-valve was adopted by many as being one of the numerous benefits America provided and a sign of its exceptional character. George Henry Evans, an early social reformer and founder of the first labor magazine in the U.S., *Working Man's Advocate*, wrote explicitly in 1844 of the safety-valve theory and the responsibility of the American government to ensure its function. He stated, "That once effected, let an outlet be formed that will carry off our superabundant labor to the salubrious and fertile West. In those regions thousands, and tens of thousands, who are now languishing in hopeless poverty, will find a certain and a speedy independence. The labor market will be thus eased of the present distressing competition; and those who remain, as well as those who emigrate, will have the opportunity of realizing a comfortable living."<sup>307</sup> Evans' hope for government action to bring a realization to the safety-valve came in 1862 through the passage of the Homestead Act. From this view the Homestead Act should be seen as one of the earliest government supported welfare measures in the U.S.

The role that the safety-valve theory and the myth that poverty did not exist has played a significant role in America's relationship to poor relief and welfare state development. These ideas have encouraged a presumption that little needs to be done, by either public or private hands, to combat poverty. Encouraged by the classically liberal idea that work is a reflection of one's self-worth, it assumes that individuals in a free and democratic society have the personal responsibility to care for themselves and not the state. If anything, the state should do everything in its power to

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<sup>307</sup> George Henry Evans, *Working Man's Advocate*, July 6, 1844 as cited in Fred A. Shannon, "A Post Mortem on the Labor-Safety Valve Theory," in *Agricultural History*, XIX (January 1945), 31-37.

enable individuals to flourish in self-sufficiency, i.e. the Homestead Act. It also fosters the belief that poverty is a choice rather than the result of factors beyond an individual's control. This enables a vision of welfare and poor relief to be efforts targeting only those who were deemed deserving of relief and managed by individualized and private endeavors. Yet the reality of America's relationship to poverty is much more complex. While individuals from early colonists to foreign admirers would hold onto the assumption that poverty did not exist in America this was not in fact the case. Furthermore, the belief that the poverty that did exist was minimal and could be managed with traditional charity from individuals, churches, or other local institutions would prove hollow when difficult economic times hit.

One of the longstanding struggles in America's relationship to welfare and poor relief is the balance between public and private responsibility. Give the role that the myth of American poverty played, the safety-valve theory, along with traditional liberal ideas, it was viewed as unnecessary for the public realm to intervene within the private. Even legislation like the Homestead Act could be viewed as not crossing this boundary as it was simply enabling individuals to pursue their own private economic endeavors and not regulating them. To claim that America's relationship to poor relief has largely been one of private initiative misses the ways that public action also participated in shaping America's attitude towards poor relief. Historian Michael Katz argues, "failure to grasp the role of public welfare in America's past today fuels nostalgia for a non-existent age of pure voluntarism and raises unrealistic expectations for the capacity of private action to ameliorate public problems."<sup>308</sup> The reality is, however, that America's relationship to

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<sup>308</sup> Michael B. Katz, "Public/Private Relations in the History of American Social Welfare", in *The Mixed Economy of Social Welfare: Public/Private Relations in England, Germany, and the United States, the 1870s to the 1930s*, eds. Michael B. Katz and Christoph Sachße, (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1996), 97.

welfare has always been a mix of both public and private and yet the power of the myths held significant influence over how the problem of poverty was understood in the United States.

The growth of the Charity Organization Society movement in the United States came as a result of the changes brought by increased industrialization, the economic depression of 1873, and the ineffectiveness of traditional forms of poor relief, the poorhouse and outdoor relief, that had dominated American life up until that point. The role of the poorhouse and the problems associated with outdoor relief encouraged American reformers to embrace the emerging practice of scientific charity that the COS movement in England embodied. In the fashion of their British counterparts, American reformers were drawn to the methods of scientific charity that helped to distinguish between the deserving and undeserving poor which could only be determined through a thorough investigation into the lives of those in need.

The principles of the Elberfeld System were attractive to American reformers not only because they facilitated a greater knowledge of the poor but also because of its mobilization of middle- and upper-class volunteers whose function as foot soldiers for relief fit nicely into the image that most individuals had of America's proper relationship to poverty. America's relationship to the Elberfeld System and the Charity Organization movement would differ from its German and British counterparts in application, yet the forces of modernization which drove American reformers to embrace this approach carried across the Atlantic. Despite significant national circumstances which influenced how locales understood poverty, the common dislocations and problems arising in the second half of the nineteenth century encouraged American reformers to look to the Old World for answers.

The interest of American reformers in what solutions Europe might be able to offer is the subject of Daniel Rodgers' seminal work *Atlantic Crossings*. Rodgers claims that beginning in the

1870s “American politics were peculiarly open to foreign models and imported ideas.”<sup>309</sup> This openness to social politics came from the larger context of industrialization that placed a new set of demands on both society and government to confront the profound, unsettling changes brought on by the developing needs of the working class, economic displacement, immigration, and massive urbanization. It was the economic vulnerability that both America and Europe experienced and the common experiences that caused countries to look outward for potential solutions. The interconnectedness of markets and industries and commonalities of industrial capitalism undermined notions of cultural, political, and economic uniqueness. This opened reformers eyes that America was not unique and had similar political economic problems. Thus, industrial capitalism and the recognition of similarities following late nineteenth century class conflict were the two factors that made a North Atlantic progressive connection possible.

The openness of American reformers to transnational networks fostered a belief that the United States was actually behind the Old World and this belief, in turn, became a significant motivator for reform and calls for an activist state. From the 1870s through the early decades of the twentieth century a new generation of professionally trained social scientists emerged as the front-line of the transatlantic connection. As these reform-minded academics looked outward for solutions they were able to transcend the notions of American exceptionalism that were grounded in Jeffersonian republican and millennialist thought. The ability of reformers to overcome exceptionalism and their welcoming of transnational influence was what set the U.S. on a path of progressive social politics so positively revolutionary and distinct it would transform the public and private realms for next several decades.

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<sup>309</sup> Daniel Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1998), 4.



The goal of transnational reformers was not to change the fundamental economic system of capitalism but rather, similarly to their idealist counterparts in Britain, “toward what they tended to see as a middle course between the rocks of cutthroat economic individualism and the shoals of an all-coercive statism.”<sup>310</sup> They proposed a state that accomplished its social responsibilities “by subsidizing the voluntary institutions of society: labor unions, cooperative associations, and mutual assistance societies.”<sup>311</sup> The actions of these reformers also demonstrate that traditional interpretations of progressive era reformers are too often anachronistic or presentist, demonstrating that social reforms on both sides of the Atlantic did not seek a modern welfare state as defined by social insurance against old age, sickness, and poverty but rather a broader reform agenda of labor and agricultural conditions, city planning, and housing. The reformers ultimate goal was to impede capitalism’s trend toward a total commodification of society and the function of social politics was the key sector for this change. The attraction to the Charity Organization Society movement and the Elberfeld principles it espoused demonstrates just one of the many transatlantic connections reformers were drawn to in response to the mounting pressures of industrial capitalism.

### **The Poorhouse and Outdoor Relief**

In the early years of the Republic, America’s relationship to poor relief continued as it had in the colonial years with local communities bearing the weight of caring for its poor under the premises of the Elizabethan poor laws with the significant help of local churches and individuals. During these early years, poverty continued to be overwhelmingly from sickness, old age, disability, widowhood, or being orphaned. As America experienced its own economic transformation in the first half of the nineteenth century through the Market Revolution the

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<sup>310</sup> Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 29.

<sup>311</sup> Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 28.

perception of poverty took on new features. American communities responded to this new poverty through constructing poorhouses which were commonplace in larger towns and cities by 1850. The poorhouse was a means of trying to deter individuals from seeking relief by confining the undeserving poor in an institution away from their families and friends. The primary purpose behind the prevalence was the poorhouse was to act as “the ultimate defense against the erosion of the work ethic in early industrial America.” Poorhouses were a reflection of America’s organization in that each was independently controlled by the local community with little, if any, state or national oversight. In turn, this meant that they were overwhelmingly “miserable, poorly managed, underfunded institutions, trapped by their own contradictions” as they floundered “to meet any of the goals so confidently predicted by their sponsors.”<sup>312</sup>

The rise of the poorhouse came from the common belief within classically liberal ideas and its practitioners that asserted that poor relief, when easily accessed and supplied, encouraged workers to be idle and fall under the assumption that relief was a right. The older practice of outdoor relief was also a target for the poorhouse. According to Michael Katz, reformers believed that indiscriminate giving encouraged the prevalence of paupers since their existence was proof to others that “a modestly comfortable life could be had without hard labor.”<sup>313</sup> By separating the undeserving poor and placing them in an institution, which removed them from the comforts of their home and families, the poorhouse held a punitive purpose to deter those who might be drawn to a life of idleness.

Yet as the prevalence of the poorhouse spread throughout the urban landscapes of the U.S. it also failed to live up to its intended purpose and were riddled with problems. Poor management

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<sup>312</sup> Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America*, (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 3.

<sup>313</sup> Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 17.

was especially chronic with over-crowding and unsanitary conditions being rampant. In 1856 the New York State Senate sent an investigative committee to visit the state's poorhouses and in their conclusions stated, "The poor houses throughout the State may be generally described as badly constructed, ill-arranged, ill-warmed, and ill-ventilated The rooms are crowded with inmates; and the air particularly in the sleeping apartments, is very noxious, and to casual visitors, almost insufferable."<sup>314</sup> Not only were the poorhouses poorly managed, they suffered from failing to recruit individuals to serve as overseers. This became such a problem that in some locations, city officials were forced to use the job as a fine in order to find someone to fill the position. Additional problems with poorhouse management came through a prevalence of corruption among overseers. For those who took on the role they saw it as an opportunity to pad their own pockets with the resources obtained for the running of the poorhouse. This inflicted even more damage onto the poor as poorhouses constantly struggled in finding sufficient resources or funds to help carry out their operational goals. The poor themselves suffered the most from the insufficient administration of these institutions. Not only was the lack of sanitary conditions and overcrowding a toil on the health of those impoverished, little was done to distinguish inmates once they were inside.

The only real success of the poorhouse was that its terrible reputation deterred only the most destitute from its seeking refuge inside its walls. Much to the chagrin of poorhouse advocates, outdoor relief remained a prominent feature within communities of all sizes throughout the United States in the nineteenth century. Historian Michael Katz postulates that as many as three to four times as many people in need of assistance received help from public outdoor relief each year than were admitted into poorhouses.<sup>315</sup> Attacks on outdoor relief were not uncommon and followed

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<sup>314</sup> New York State Senate, "Report of Select Committee to visit Charitable Institutions supported by the State, and all city and county poor and work houses and jails." In Senate, January 9, 1857 as cited in Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 26, 339f.

<sup>315</sup> Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 3.

similar criticisms as was found in Europe. For anxious reformers, excessive giving to those in need encouraged a demoralization of the poor, fostered idle behavior, and further encouraged an immoral lifestyle that produced a degeneration amongst societies lowest class.

Fears about the effects caused by outdoor relief were unfounded as those who were most helped by outdoor relief were the deserving poor and were not considered to be those whom reformers were so intent on putting to work. However, perception was, as in most things, more important than reality for critics of outdoor relief. It was those few cases of individuals not working and living off relief that proved that the fears and objections to outdoor relief were justified. Private charities were a common feature within American communities. They functioned to supplement church activities and would frequently spring up in response to a crisis and then diminish or fade away completely when the economy stabilized. Their approach to relief was primarily to give out direct aid to those who were in need and did little investigation or coordination with the poorhouse or other authorities. The prevalence of outdoor relief associations grew exponentially during the years of the Civil War, responding to the needs of dislocated persons, newly freed slaves, or soldiers. Yet after the war was over many of these associations did not fade back into oblivion as had previously occurred. Rather they were beginning to become a fixed feature in cities as the numbers of those in need never seemed to significantly decline. When the Panic of 1873 hit American life and brought the problem of consistent and chronic unemployment to the forefront of American discourse, the role that unchecked private outdoor relief assumed reached unprecedented levels. Outdoor relief became the primary target of blame for the rise of a new underclass of impoverished citizens, personified in the image of the tramp.

## The Tramp

The Panic of 1873 produced the most evident consequence of economic constriction in the image of the tramp. The word originated from social commentators to represent the displaced men who had lost their jobs and were, as a result, forced to roam from town to town begging for relief or jobs. The prevalence of these vagrants traveling from city to city became a visible symbol of modernity's forces and the negative effects that could accompany free-market enterprise. However, while tramps were the result of systemic economic factors outside of individual control, the typical American response to the tramp's pervasiveness was to blame individual moral failings and the failing of outdoor relief that encouraged tramps to view the tramp life as a viable alternative to finding consistent work.<sup>316</sup>

The development of the tramp was in direct correlation to other common features among America's working class for much of the nineteenth century. Chief among these features was the nature of mobility amongst American workers. As Michael B. Katz argues, communities had frequently experienced a significant mobility of workers in search of jobs. However, this feature went uncommented on by most of the cities permanent inhabitants who accepted it as a "ubiquitous...feature of social life." Katz contends that this human movement "was a great, quiet, almost underground stream, accepted, without doubt, as part of the landscape, a feature so well known it scarcely deserved comment."<sup>317</sup> The Panic of 1873 changed this silent accepted feature of city and working-class life into an exacerbated threat potentially undoing class stability. In the

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<sup>316</sup> See Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964); Alexander Keyssar, *Out of Work: The First Century of Unemployment in Massachusetts*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Todd DePastino, *Citizen Hobo: How a Century of Homelessness Shaped America*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2003); Paul T. Rigenbach, *Tramps and Reformers, 1873-1916: The Discovery of Unemployment in New York*, (Westport [Conn.]: Greenwood Press Inc, 1973).

<sup>317</sup> Michael B. Katz, *Poverty and Policy in American Life*, (New York: Academic Press, 1983), 157.

Panic's aftermath, Americans began articulating the mobile displaced labor force from being an "unemployed, wandering, hungry, and perhaps often angry men into a new and menacing class."<sup>318</sup>

As the growing menace of tramps plagued American cities in the 1870s social reformers, politicians, and city administrators sought to comprehend the change. Surprisingly, few of these individuals who were preoccupied with the increased presence of tramps related the uptick to the consequences of the economic depression. Historian Paul T. Ringenbach, in his work on tramps in New York, posits that debates and anxieties about tramps never articulated themselves with a connection to the Panic of 1873.<sup>319</sup> While the Panic was without a doubt responsible for the increased unemployment, individuals who wrote about the problem found the fault to lie with individual moral failings and the inherent weakness of tramps. For example, in 1877 the Conference of Boards of Public Charities organized a committee to investigate the nature of tramps and what possible solutions there would be for ridding cities of their presence. One of the committee's leaders was a professor from Yale, Francis Wayland. He gave his report to the conference defining what he believed to be the true nature of tramps:

And as we utter the word *Tramp*, there arises straightaway before us the spectacle of a lazy, shiftless, sauntering or swaggering, ill-conditioned, irreclaimable, incorrigible, cowardly, utterly depraved savage. He fears not God, neither regards man. Indeed, he seems to have wholly lost all the better instincts and attributes of manhood...Having no moral sense he knows no gradations in crime. He dreads detection and punishment, and he dreads nothing else...Practically, he has come to consider himself at war with society and all social institutions.<sup>320</sup>

The Panic of 1873 was just an excuse for tramps to seize upon as an excuse for tramping behavior, according to commentators like Wayland. Additionally, other writers saw any tragedy or calamity that struck a community as an excuse for tramps. Lee O. Harris, an educator, former Union officer,

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<sup>318</sup> Katz, *Poverty and Policy in American Life*, 158.

<sup>319</sup> Ringenbach, *Tramps and Reformers*.

<sup>320</sup> "Professor Wayland's Report on Tramps" in *Proceedings of the Conference of Charities*, (November 1877), 112.

and social commentator from Indiana, wrote “Every great misfortune in any part of the country was seized upon as an excuse for vagrancy, and the land was filled with Kansas sufferers who never saw Kansas, and pretended victims of the great Chicago fire told pitiful tales of loss and suffering, that brought them sympathy and food.”<sup>321</sup>

Contemporaries also believed there were factors responsible for the growth of tramping prevalent within American society. Critics blamed the American Civil War for teaching men to live a shiftless existence, surviving off the land and through handouts from people they would encounter. While many volunteer soldiers took up arms during the war they returned home and resumed their occupations the war also brought out a different type of volunteer who came “from the slums of the cities and towns, and even from the jails and penitentiaries, who, tempted by the large bounties then offered and the chances of plunder, became soldiers in name. though few of them were ever really soldiers in fact.”<sup>322</sup> Commentators like Harris claimed that “The reckless, free life of the army had given them a taste for wandering and a distaste for every species of labor, and following their natural instincts, directed by their acquired habits, they became professional tramps.”<sup>323</sup> Since Harris had served as a Captain in the Union Army, he would have inevitably felt qualified to make such judgements on the nature of soldiers and their experiences in the war.

The other alleged contributing factor enabling the flourishing of tramps was individual excessive generosity to those in need. While on the surface this was not a characteristic American’s should feel shameful for, yet the manipulations of tramps turned the hospitality into a means of vagrancy. In the 1877 investigation into tramps, one of the leaders of the committee, Edward Everett Hale, wrote in his report, “In America, all these stimulants to vagrancy are quickened by

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<sup>321</sup> Lee O. Harris, *The Man Who Tramps: A Story of To-day*, (1878), 19.

<sup>322</sup> Lee O. Harris, *The Man Who Tramps*, 17.

<sup>323</sup> Lee O. Harris, *The Man Who Tramps*, 18.

the reckless generosity and hospitality of the people. To refuse to give to a wayfarer what is familiarly called “a meal of vittels,” has been, for centuries, regarded here as a sign of utter meanness, - almost unheard of, - and to be spoken of only with contempt.”<sup>324</sup> The impetus of Americans to give when they saw need was a noble gesture but helped to provide a sense of entitlement amongst vagrants and encouraged them to not find proper work, thus exacerbating the problem of pauperism gripping America’s towns and cities. Lee Harris stated, “The people of both the country and the town, naturally charitable and kind-hearted, only increased the rapidly-growing evil by their well-meant but indiscriminate charity, and this class of persons learned that there was an easier way to getting their bread than by the sweat of their brows...It is not so much the distress of others which causes them to give, as it is their own pain at beholding misery, and a desire to relieve their own feelings by contributing aid to all who claim to be suffering. So the tramp was well fed, and grew, and multiplied in the land.”<sup>325</sup>

The very presence of tramps within the United States was an anathema to America’s character, according to critics. Since unemployment was a rare phenomenon in the years before the Panic, many considered the surge in the number of tramps to be not the result of economic forces but of fundamental lack on the part of individuals to not seek out work. Reformers and officials believed that plenty of work existed for those who wanted it, it was just a matter of going out and finding it and being willing to take the work that was offered. Viewing tramps and unemployment in this fashion enabled individuals to look past the flaws in capitalism and focus instead on the degradation of the masses as a result of pauperization. In order to identify those undeserving tramps who were lazy and morally unfit an attempt was made by reformers to

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<sup>324</sup> “Mr. Hale’s Report on Tramps,” in *Proceedings of the Conference of Charities*, (November 1877), 104.

<sup>325</sup> Lee O. Harris, *The Man Who Tramps*, 19.



investigate and study the nature of tramps. In 1875 an investigation was launched by the New York State Board of Charities to inquire into the nature of tramps who had requested public relief within the state by having tramps answer a series of questions ascertaining their personal details. Questions included their age, place of birth, habits, education, where they began tramping, how long they had been engaged in that effort, where they had been aided, and why they were seeking relief.<sup>326</sup>

As information was collected over a six-month period from around the state of New York a more defined image of the tramp came into being that for reformers seemed to confirm much of what they already believed about tramps. From the statistics, which must be evaluated cautiously for the inherent bias on the accuracy of the data and whether or not causal attribution encouraged reformers to view the numbers in a way that affirmed their already deeply held convictions. Michael B. Katz has analyzed the investigative findings that produce what the State Board of Charities would have seen to be characteristics of the tramp. The character drawn was that of a young unmarried man, usually under the age of thirty, who were immigrants, but not recently arrived in the U.S., and who claimed to possess some form of craft skill. Some of these characteristics fit nicely within the narrative already espoused by tramp critics but others did not. For example, the claim that tramps made of having a craft skill was not in line with the popular belief that tramps were unskilled. Furthermore, statistics demonstrated that there were some women tramps, usually those who were tramping with their spouses. The contemporary idea that this was a male-dominated experience meant that those tramping women were largely excluded from the narrative being touted in the findings. On the other hand, popular rhetoric assumed that many tramps were immigrants but thought they had been sent over by their country of origin as a

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<sup>326</sup> John V.L. Pruyn, *Tenth Annual Report* (1877).

means of ridding themselves of a problem. This, however, proved not to be so. Yes, tramps were immigrants, but many of them were in the tramp life as a result of recent economic developments and did not lead a life of tramping in their mother country. Ultimately, Katz contends that the most striking feature the statistics provide of the tramp is that “tramps should be viewed more as casualties of working-class life than as a degenerate stratum outside the class structure...For these men and women tramping was a recent, probably temporary, activity, not a way of life.” This was something that reformers would not have embraced. They held onto the original association of the term to mean someone who existed in a “permanent condition...outside the class structure...outside of civilized social life.”<sup>327</sup>

While contemporary critics and social reformers found the American Civil War and excessive generosity as contributing features to a rise in tramping, along with the new empirically defined tramp thanks to the official investigation, there remained additional convictions about the image of the tramp that spoke directly to growing fears about the changes modernity brought to American society. One of these images was that the tramp was part of a violent, rabble-rousing, proletariat underclass that preyed on the difficult circumstances of honest workers. The tramp encouraged labor unrest and fostered ideas of revolution. Lee Harris was particularly concerned over the workers uprising in the Paris Commune of 1871 who he believed had then sent many of its agitators to the U.S. to foster revolutionary sentiment among American workers. He stated,

Vicious agitators, who had tasted of the intoxication of anarchy and bloodshed, when driven from France found a refuge here. With all the natural instincts of the American tramp, combined with the treachery of the serpent and the ferocity of the tiger, they carried with them a prestige and a power which soon made itself felt. Then the tramp ceased to be merely a nuisance; he became a terror. Then followed scenes of riot and bloodshed that made the nation grow pale. The pernicious doctrines that had convulsed France, and dyed her rivers red with blood, were

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<sup>327</sup> Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 166-171.

openly preached upon the streets of our cities, and gained many followers among those who either had not the intelligence or the inclination to see what terrible scenes of misery and devastation they tended.<sup>328</sup>

The prevalence of the tramp and the violence he inevitably brought gripped the minds of Americans in the 1870s. The American political magazine *Harper's Weekly* wrote an article in 1876 titled "The Tramp" in which they articulated the image of the tramp along with the fear and violence he brought to communities throughout the nation:

"*Knights of the turnpike*," as they are facetiously called by a correspondent of one of our daily newspapers, but better known under the simpler cognomen of "tramps," have of late become a recognized class in our community. Formerly we were accustomed to hear only occasionally of these dangerous stragglers, who wandered through villages, alarming women and children by their wild appearance and imperious demands for food and shelter, but of late the country has been infested with them. They are no longer simply traveling beggars, but thieves and robbers, without respect for persons or property. They appropriate to their own uses whatever they can lay hands on, and, if necessary, use violence, sometimes amounting to murder, rather than forego their plunder. As the law appears to be almost helpless against them, farmers and others who are the victims of outrage on the part of these peregrinating scoundrels are frequently obliged to arm themselves in their own defense, and drive the wretches out of the country by force.<sup>329</sup>

Ultimately the fears of America's elite came to fruition when the revolutionary influence encouraged American workers to carry out their own national strike in 1877 against the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad signaling that class fears were not an old-world phenomenon but part of a new industrialized America. For the concerned middle- and upper-classes, this strike was an opportunity for the tramp as they believed "his influence is felt in politics, and in nearly all of the social relations." From this newfound position of influence the tramp was "always on watch for every convulsion in society, he turned it to his own advantage. Honest laborers, thinking to better their condition, struck for higher wages or for the redress of grievances; as soon as the thing was

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<sup>328</sup> Lee O. Harris, *The Man Who Tramps*, 19-20.

<sup>329</sup> "The Tramp" in *Harper's Weekly*, Volume 1876, Issue September 2, 718-719. Italics in the original.

done, it passed into the hands of the tramp, who, having nothing to lose, could afford to take great risks. Riots were inaugurated by them that they might gratify their desire for destruction and for plunder, and under the name of workingmen they brought reproach upon the name of labor.”<sup>330</sup>

Along with the tramp bringing violence and stroking class conflict, the other concerning feature of the tramp was his association with degeneration and the preying on innocent women and children. As was articulated in the *Harper's Weekly* article, women and children were the group most preyed upon by tramps as they were defenseless in their attempt to ward them off. One story recounted in the Conference of Boards of Public Charities investigative committee into tramps said that “twenty years ago any woman within two miles of his church would have been willing to come, without escort, to any evening service in it, and to return home in the same way” but now “no woman in the town would willingly go along after dark a quarter of a mile from home” due to prevalence of tramps within her community.<sup>331</sup> In most of the drawings depicting the tramp he was preying on women (see figure 5.1). Trying to enter into their homes and seek some form of handout with the woman shrinking back out of fear and without protection. Just as Richard Evans found in his investigation into the German underworld and the distinct actions and language produced by criminals, so too did the tramps.<sup>332</sup> The *Harper's Weekly* article emphasized these traits saying, “[Tramps] are known to have a regular organization, and they communicate with each other by certain signs. A mark on the fence, intelligible only to themselves, will serve to indicate a house where they can be certain of securing a good meal, with a possible opportunity of stealing something.”<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> Lee O. Harris, *The Man Who Tramps*, 20.

<sup>331</sup> “Mr. Hale’s Report on Tramps,” 105.

<sup>332</sup> See Chapter 3 and Richard J. Evans, *Tales from the German Underworld: Crime and Punishment in the Nineteenth Century*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>333</sup> “The Tramp,” 718-719.

The fear created by the tramp's association with revolutionary class upheaval and degeneration along with the concerted efforts to investigate and studying the nature of tramps demonstrates a desire amongst reformers in the late nineteenth century to systematically know and measure social problems. Reformers believed that if they could categorically understand a problem like tramping and the nature of those associated with this condition then they could curb the actions of individual who encouraged tramping, and pauperism with it, as a way of life and streamline relief efforts to ensure that relief was only given to the deserving poor. It is though this connection that gave rise to what was known in the 1870s as scientific charity which would enable to formation of the American Charity Organization Society.

### **Scientific Charity, the American Charity Organization Society, and the Elberfeld System**

By the 1870s the allure of scientific ideas as a means of better organizing poor relief began manifesting themselves through the emergence of new associations and institutions. America's lack of unified structure between local, state, and national governments reflected the ways these new groups developed, who participated in them, or what their main concerns were. However, there began a greater sense of common purpose among America's reformers who saw the massive levels of need in American cities and the inability of older poor relief structures to properly meet those need which drove them to embracing a scientific orientation to charity. The appeal of scientific charity was its acceptance of principles that were rational, empirical, and motivated not by religious or mawkish feelings, but rather motivated by an investigative spirit that sought to approach poverty individually and specifically. Many reformers argued that scientific charity rose above the divisive nature of religion and politics given that science focused on objective truth and its conclusions were grounded in fact not opinion. This did not mean that neither religion nor politics were uncritical of scientific charity. By the late nineteenth century, science and religion

grew farther apart as controversial theories like Darwinian evolution seemed to undermine the Bible's authority. This made the church increasingly skeptical of ideas that assumed the banner of science. Politics also began to be concerned with scientific charity as it could potentially call for greater government responsibility into areas that were strictly off limits or for changes within the governing structure that might undermine the economic status quo. For example, calls for legislation supporting temperance, checking immigration quotas, or tax reform like Henry George's single tax plan.

The drive for applying a scientific rational to poor relief is what drove American reformers to be drawn to the Charity Organization movement and the Elberfeld principles it applied. The individualized and investigative nature of the Elberfeld System and the London COS's application of these principles into a private charity were the motivation for American reformers to embrace this approach. Coupled with the growing threat of the Tramp, fears of degeneration amongst the urban poor, and the increased hostility towards the ineffectiveness of outdoor relief efforts reformers believed that a new approach to charity would help solve these social ills.

Awareness of both the Charity Organization movement and the Elberfeld System came to the United States through the efforts of a minister living in Buffalo, New York, named Stephen Humphreys Gurteen (1836-1898). Gurteen was a native of England and came to the U.S. in the 1860s as the nation was in the midst of the Civil War. He was only twenty-seven and had recently graduated from Cambridge University when he arrived in New York City. Upon his arrival he experienced the effects of the Civil War conflict when in July 1863 he bore witness to the draft riots plaguing the city, imprinting in his mind the depths of despair and antagonism that urged individuals to revolt. He recalled, "We ourselves saw that revolting spectacle of 5,000 men, women and children sweeping down the leading avenue of the city in the darkness of night, the lurid flames

of a hundred torches, disclosing a scene of wild license scarcely surpassed by any single incident of the French revolution – women, and mothers at that, with their bare breasts exposed to the winds of heaven brandishing deadly weapons and uttering foul and loathsome language; - men, breathing out persecution to the innocent and to children, while the very air as they passed was polluted by their drunken breath.”<sup>334</sup> Years later this experience, along with fears regarding the growing attraction of communism, largely in response to the first nationwide strike of 1877, jolted Gurteen into recognizing what he saw as a pauperization of the masses within society demanding something needed to be done.

After his introduction to American life in New York City, Gurteen’s next steps are clouded in speculation. Records are sparse but it seems that despite what he experienced in the city that summer he stayed in the state and was persuaded by a friend to attend law school in the U.S. Yet after completing his studies Gurteen was unwilling to forfeit his British citizenship for admittance to the New York Bar, thus never finishing his work to become a lawyer. His studies though provided him with an extensive understanding of both the American and New York state legal system, something that would be important for his later work with the COS movement. After abandoning the avenue of becoming a practicing lawyer Gurteen spent the next decade as a private tutor, preparing other young men to attending university. He also filled his days with writing some of his own works, none of which had anything to do with social welfare, philanthropy, or poverty, indicating that his dedication to these issues would come later.

Gurteen’s interest in social reform came when he entered the ministry in April 1874 after having been in the U.S. for about a decade. The reason for this occupational change is unknown

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<sup>334</sup> Stephen Humphreys Gurteen, *Phases of Charity*, (Buffalo: Haas, Nauert & Klein, 1877), 40-41.

but seems to have been the result of influence by several supporters and friends in the upstate New York community who were already serving in the Anglican church. In November 1875 Gurteen was appointed assistant minister at St. Paul's Church in Buffalo. Upon his arrival to the city he saw how the economic depression that had begun in 1873 continued to plague laborers and industry. By the winter of 1875-1876 the traditional poor relief resources were overwhelmed with requests for aid and the growing numbers of destitute "shocked and their importunities and increasing restiveness outraged the sensibilities of the community's well-to-do."<sup>335</sup> Gurteen responded by taking up active participation within the city's most reputable relief organization of St. Paul's Guild. By the following October he had made such notoriety within the organization he proposed a new relief scheme of providing day care for children of working mothers so as to enable them to contribute more broadly to the family economy. By the spring of 1877 Gurteen was promoted as warden of the Guild, making him the leader of poor relief within the community, but also as assistant rector in his church.

Despite all the inroads Gurteen believed he was making in response to difficult economic times, things took a more drastic and, in his view, dangerous turn in 1877 when railway workers across the nation took a stand against their employers. Many middle- and upper-class observers, Gurteen included, believed they were witnessing "that yawning chasm of Communism opened at our feet, which appeared to threaten nearly every thing in ordinary life..." That summer Gurteen traveled back to his native England in order to learn about the Charity Organization movement after becoming acutely aware that Buffalo's "terrible state of affairs in the matter of poor relief."<sup>336</sup> He spent two months in London learning from COS officials, getting access to their publications

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<sup>335</sup> Verl S. Lewis, "Stephen Humphreys Gurteen and the American Origins of Charity Organization" in *Social Service Review*, Vol. 40 No. 2 (June, 1966), 195.

<sup>336</sup> Stephen Humphreys Gurteen, "Beginning of Charity Organizations in America" in *Lend a Hand*, XVII (November 1894), 355.



and annual reports to bring back with him, and accompanying various district overseers (including Octavia Hill) on their rounds to investigate the claims made by applicants.

Gurteen took the information he gleaned in London and drew up plans for an American version of the COS. While he was intent on using what he learned in England as a “model” he also “adapted [it] to the conditions social, political and religious of this country.”<sup>337</sup> He presented this new approach to poor relief to a selection group of Buffalo’s elite along with his fellow Guild leaders. After gaining their approval, Gurteen moved forward with introducing COS principles through a series of lectures given at his church in November 1877. These lectures were then printed in the Buffalo Courier, the city’s local newspaper, ensuring the ability for proposed system to reach a wider audience. Additionally, Gurteen wrote a pamphlet entitled “The Proposed Charity Organization for the City of Buffalo” and “sent [it] to five hundred of the prominent professional and business men of the city, together with a letter asking their opinion of the proposed Society...”<sup>338</sup> Gurteen claimed that “over three hundred answers were returned, all heartily approving of the plans and promising cooperation.”<sup>339</sup> With this level of support, Gurteen moved forward with formally organizing the first American COS branch and held its first official meeting in December 1877 at its new central office.

While there is no evidence to suggest that Gurteen traveled to Germany to investigate the Elberfeld System in its origin city, he was not unaware of the influence the System’s principles had on the formation of the London COS movement. He saw a commonality to the type of poverty that transcended national boundaries. The growth of indiscriminate giving that encouraged the growth of pauperization amongst the masses was the common feature that needed to be managed.

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<sup>337</sup> Gurteen, “Beginning of Charity Organizations in America,” 358.

<sup>338</sup> Gurteen, “Beginning of Charity Organizations in America,” 358.

<sup>339</sup> Gurteen, “Beginning of Charity Organizations in America,” 358.

Gurteen believed that the investigative nature of the Elberfeld System, adopted by the COS, was the cornerstone for dealing with the problem of pauperization. In one of Gurteen's addresses given on this issue he articulated the framework that undergirded the COS saying "the Elberfeld system...show[ed] what might be accomplished by systematic, constant and kindly oversight of a friend at the homes of the poor, taking when necessary, relief to the home and doing away with the degrading necessity of obliging the poor either to ask or to seek charity."<sup>340</sup>

Gurteen was intentional about copying the COS London operation in total when bringing it to the U.S. but he also knew that certain features would need to fit the specific nature of American life. The most important of those changes was embracing a fully non-sectarian operation. While the British COS utilized prominent members of the Church of England in its leadership and kept a close association with local churches in various districts, Gurteen wanted his operation in Buffalo to be separate from the multi-confessional nature of the U.S, even going so far as to claim that the non-sectarian nature would be a unique "American principle" to the COS operation.<sup>341</sup> Gurteen ensured this from the start, having the selection of men who he first approached with the COS when he returned from England being from diverse backgrounds including "a prominent Roman Catholic" and "two bring young lawyers, agnostics, whom we jocosely designated "the good heathens.""<sup>342</sup> Gurteen even went so far as to prohibit members of clergy from serving on the COS Buffalo's council, himself obviously excluded.<sup>343</sup> In laying out the framework the American COS would undertake, Gurteen emphasized that the non-sectarian nature would trickle down into its lowest levels of application. He argued that the Society's "cardinal principle" was "the complete

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<sup>340</sup> Stephen Humphreys Gurteen, *How Paupers are Made: An Address on the Prevention of Pauperism*, (Chicago, 1883), 7-8.

<sup>341</sup> Humphreys Gurteen, "Beginning of Charity Organizations in America," 360.

<sup>342</sup> Humphreys Gurteen, "Beginning of Charity Organizations in America," 356-357.

<sup>343</sup> Stephen Humphreys Gurteen, *Handbook of Charity Organization*, (Buffalo, 1882), 123.

severance of charitable relief, whether official or private, from all considerations of religion, politics, and nationality.” This was to ensure a “harmonious co-operation between all classes of our citizens.” Furthermore, friendly visitors were to “*never, under any circumstances, use his position for purposes of proselytism or spiritual instruction; and on the other, that the religious instructor...shall never be the almoner of material relief.*”<sup>344</sup>

Gurteen’s desire for the formation of the COS in America was not contained to Buffalo but rather he wanted to see it taken to as many cities as possible. The adoption of scientific charity and COS principles moved from Buffalo to Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Indianapolis. Yet none was more important than its adoption in the nation’s largest city, New York. The arrival of the COS to New York City in 1882 came through the dedicated work of social reformer Josephine Shaw Lowell (1843-1905). Lowell came from a well-to-do family in Boston who had a reputation of being a family committed to social reform, most notably they were radical abolitionists. Lowell lost her mother at a young age and her father moved the family to Long Island in the late 1840s but Josephine left for Europe and traveled throughout the continent for five years. At the outbreak of the Civil War the Shaw family took up arms for the Union carrying their abolitionist sentiments into action when her father helped form the Freedman’s Bureau and her brother, Robert Gould Shaw, led the first black regiment of Union soldiers. Josephine married Charles Russell Lowell, a fellow Bostonian and friend of her brother, in the middle of the war. Yet in October 1864, only a month before giving birth to her only child, Charles Lowell died in battle leaving Josephine a young widow. She would never remarry.

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<sup>344</sup> Stephen Humphreys Gurteen, *Phases of Charity*, 61. Italics in the original.

In the aftermath of personal tragedy Lowell began an active career in social reform. Undoubtedly influenced by her family's dedication to the abolitionist cause, Lowell spent the last years of the Civil War working for the U.S. Sanitary Commission and becoming a major force of fundraising for the National Freedman's Relief Association. Then in 1872 she joined the New York State Charities Aid Association where she began fulfilling the role of visitor traveling to the state's jails and poorhouses. She was outraged at the conditions of these institutions and wrote a series of reports that pushed the state into an official statewide investigation of "able-bodied paupers." By 1876 Lowell had secured a place on the New York State Board of Charities, an honor bestowed upon her by the governor and was the only woman on the committee. In this role she continued her efforts to expose the problems of state institutions. Through her work on the State Board of Charities Lowell became acquainted with the work that Gurteen was doing in Buffalo and sought to bring the COS movement to New York City.

It was through the tireless work of Lowell that the nation's largest city would adopt the COS movement and in turn produce its most notable branch. Through her other relief work Lowell was optimistic with the promise scientific charity seemed to hold for modernity's problems. She believed that pauperism could be combatted and cured through a careful oversight that the COS methodology provided. Using Gurteen's *Handbook of Charity Organization* as her basis she formed New York City's COS branch in February 1882. She also relied upon the help of fellow COS reformers in Boston and Philadelphia as guides for traversing the uncharted waters of organizing the city's many charities. Lowell understood the importance of the COS succeeding in New York, believing that if it did not take root there, it would most likely not succeed in other cities and that those urban centers who might be inclined to adopt the COS movement would look to New York for guidance.

Lowell ensured that in the New York office she would hold a position of power and influence, yet she also knew the objections that would come to her holding this place due to her gender. Therefore, Lowell took active steps to balance her power with the belief that these issues were outside the realm of female responsibility. Ever the pragmatist Lowell believed “that the majority of men, representing the wealth and power in society, would not respect or support a cause or an organization in which women were perceived as the leaders.” Lowell herself warned, “However just the cause she may defend...a scolding woman is a terror to all men, no one will listen to her, no one will sympathize with her; she only injures her own cause.”<sup>345</sup> She understood the attraction that scientific charity could have to the business community and thus knew getting these men on her side was of utmost importance. Lowell reached out reform minded men in the city, such as Robert Weeks de Forest, to come along side her and provide the semblance of male guardianship over the organization. De Forest would go on to serve as president of the New York COS, a role he would hold for forty years, and helped to serve as the public face of the branch while Lowell continued to oversee much of its operation. While Lowell understood the need to balance her presence with the expected gender norms of the day, she always saw the COS as an avenue for female participation. Much of the work, in every U.S. branch and in England, was done by women functioning as the “shock troops of charity.”<sup>346</sup>

Lowell, as a leader and practitioner of scientific charity, is an interesting juxtaposition when compared to Gurteen. Gurteen fundamentally opposed women holding any positions of leadership within his ideal of the COS. He did believe that they would likely serve as friendly visitors since men would be busy fulfilling their occupational responsibilities. The leadership work

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<sup>345</sup> Joan Waugh, *Unsentimental Reformer: The Life of Josephine Shaw Lowell*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 153.

<sup>346</sup> Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 67.

on the Council or District Committee was “man’s work” according to Gurteen. Ambitious women could find fulfillment, he thought, knowing her “life...raised but one family from dependence, idleness and beggary, to self-support, honest labor and independence.” But it was not just for the poor that women’s efforts would help but, according to Gurteen, it also would teach a valuable lesson to women. Serving as friendly visitors would alter the “whole complexion of the habits and thought” of women “would undergo a change.” Serving would help to alter their nature by becoming less frivolous, allowing them to realize that “life itself” was “a more serious matter.”<sup>347</sup> Therefore scientific charity did more than reform the nature of the poor, according to Gurteen, it reform the perceived inferior nature of the female mind.

The Elberfeld System reached a wider American audience through the annual meetings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction (NCCC) which began in 1874. These meetings became an avenue in which practitioners of scientific charity gathered annually to share and exchange ideas and approaches to social welfare. The annual meeting was the result of work done by various state charity and public health commissioners from Illinois and Wisconsin. The first mention of the Elberfeld System came at the NCCC’s inaugural meeting in 1874, several years before Gurteen’s endeavors in Buffalo. In a report given on outdoor relief the Elberfeld System was described as one of the three ways outdoor relief is managed in the industrialized world with particular details included that emphasized its enlightened and scientific grounding.<sup>348</sup> Discussions regarding the Elberfeld System returned in 1878 when it was used as a point of contrast to the outdoor relief administered in New York City at the time. The reference to Germany lauded how the Elberfeld System operated on providing relief on a fixed scale that considered the rates

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<sup>347</sup> Gurteen, *Handbook of Charity Organization*, 186.

<sup>348</sup> Social Welfare History Archive, National Conference on Social Welfare Proceedings, “Report on Outdoor Relief,” (1874), 47-51.

appropriate for the working-class life at the time. The report emphasized that, at the time, New York City did not do this but should consider its benefits.<sup>349</sup>

The first association of the Elberfeld System with the Charity Organization Society movement came in 1880 when Reverend Oscar McCulloch of Indianapolis gave a speech on the history of the COS movement. In his speech he connected the Elberfeld System in Germany as being the location in which the movement towards scientific charity began. He traced its movement from Germany to England and then the United States. McCulloch's speech demonstrates that American reformers associated with the COS were part of a transnational reform movement that saw common problems produced by modern society with common solutions that each could learn from one another. While reformers like McCulloch, Gurteen, and Lowell understood that the U.S. was not Germany and would not adopt the Elberfeld System in the same fashion there were reciprocal links that enabled the circulation of its principles.<sup>350</sup> For example, McCulloch's assessment of the Elberfeld System was not without criticism. He cited that one of its "defects" was "[i]ts official character. It is relief given by the State." This was a defect in McCulloch's view because of how it turned the poor into believing that relief was a right provided to them by the government and, from an American perspective, encouraged a false sense of the proper divide between public and private. He also believed that it was a ploy that socialists latched onto saying, "The socialists are not slow to see this, and to teach the poor and discontented that the State owes this [relief] to them."<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>349</sup> Social Welfare History Archive, National Conference on Social Welfare Proceedings, "Outdoor Relief Administration in New York City," (1878), 68.

<sup>350</sup> Social Welfare History Archive, National Conference on Social Welfare Proceedings, "Associated Charities.," (1880), 125-127.

<sup>351</sup> Social Welfare History Archive, National Conference on Social Welfare Proceedings, "Associated Charities.," (1880), 126.

While the connections between Elberfeld and the U.S. were never as direct as those occurring within Great Britain the ideas behind the System were part of a reform rhetoric that transcended boundaries or welfare measures. The reform rhetoric transcended national boundaries yet never surrendered a sense of national uniqueness. The transnational reform milieu described common problems as reformers understood them, such as mass pauperization, a degeneration amongst the lower-classes, a growing divide between rich and poor, and the pitfalls of unchecked outdoor relief. Therefore, solutions also existed within this common framework. Ideas surrounding the personal investigation into the lives of the poor, the coordinated efforts of private charities, and the responsibility of the wealthy to shape and influence those who were poor. Ultimately, this meant that while the U.S. government would never send investigative missions to Germany, like England did, or debate the merits of shaping its poor relief structure in the Elberfeld image, practitioners still saw themselves as belonging to and participating in a transnational reform milieu.

### **A Charity Clearing House**

Gurteen described the major goal for the COS to be a “charity *clearing-house*.” This meant ending the indiscriminate giving that had become chronic, according to critics, in outdoor relief. In organizing the relief efforts of various charities, Gurteen hoped the COS would “effectually check instead of fostering pauperism” and would “result in mutual advantage and saving to all of our benevolent associations.”<sup>352</sup> Therefore it was for both the benefit of charitable agencies and the poor themselves that the clearing-house approach would seek to remedy. Historian Verl Lewis, one of the few scholars who has written about Gurteen, argues that Gurteen’s adoption of this clear-housing rhetoric made his COS scheme uniquely attractive to businessmen within the Buffalo community and would help spread the COS to other cities. According to Lewis, “The

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<sup>352</sup> Stephen Humphreys Gurteen, *Phases of Charity*, 64. Italics in the original.



connotation of commercial efficiency enabled the business community to comprehend its interest in charity organization in the familiar concept, and wealthy business leaders were prominent in the Buffalo COS, as elsewhere.”<sup>353</sup> Lowell also understood the advantage of attracting businessmen in supporting the COS in New York City. The registering of charities within communities as well as the registering of the poor themselves, became one of the most essential contributions the American COS had on welfare state development.

The notion of the COS being a charity clearing house was a reflection of its adoption of Elberfeld principles. Additionally, this was another reason that the proponents of scientific charity were drawn to the Elberfeld System in that the empirical approach was not just for how relief should be better regulated and dispersed but also for how it enabled a gathering of information about the poor themselves. COS leaders understood that greater knowledge equated greater power and therefore the more information gleaned about the poor the greater ease in managing them. The COS, both in the U.S. and Great Britain, compiled massive records of those they encountered who were in need of aid. This enabled the charity to ensure that individuals were not getting aid from multiple sources and would maintain a record of their progress, or lack thereof, to determine their worthiness. Take for example the record kept for Ellen McGonigal. She and her husband first “came to the attention” of the COS in New York City in February 1894 when her husband was out of work. The family was “aided, but only for a short time” with then the case being closed followed by “a few short periods of re-opening.” Then in the spring of 1901 the family fell into “continuous contact” with the COS when the Ellen and her husband had their seventh child and then two weeks later the husband dying “suddenly and mysteriously.” Then followed an appeal to help Ellen pay her rent which was undertaken by a friendly visitor who was “interested to work with us in behalf

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<sup>353</sup> Verl S. Lewis, “Stephen Humphreys Gurteen and the American Origins of Charity Organization,” 198-199.

of the family.” It seems as if this care continued until the summer of 1903 when Ellen’s case was closed because she and her family moved outside the district who had been overseeing them. The family then fell into a separate district who were notified of the family relocation. The COS records state that “within one month suspicion was arouse that matters were not all as they should be, and as the result of careful inquiry” new facts about Ellen’s undeserving nature were discovered:

A certain Christopher Daniels, an employee on the Second Avenue Elevated, and Mrs. McGonigal have been living together all this time as man and wife. Frequently both have been in a state of serious intoxication. On January 24, 1903, according to hospital records, Mrs. McGonigal was delivered of a full term stillborn child, which the neighbors claim need not have been stillborn had proper precautions been taken, and that later she had a miscarriage, probably brought on by herself. It was also learned that she is one of nine children, and that brothers and sisters in Pittsburgh, Brooklyn and New York, have been willing to provide for her and her children, except for the fact they were aware of these immoral conditions[.] The motorman, a large, stout fellow, had ceased working regularly, allowing the woman to support him, - a situation which was the subject of some comment among his fellow-employees when inquiry was made. On July 10, 1903, the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, had received a complaint from neighbors, and as a result of the Society’s investigation, they reported to the Seventh District Agent that Mrs. McGonigal is intemperate and a woman of doubtful reputation. The children were removed to the Society’s rooms, taken before the Children’s Court, where the woman was severely reprimanded and told that any further criticism would cause them to remove the children permanently.<sup>354</sup>

The case of Ellen McGonigal demonstrates several key parts to the COS’s operation. First, it proved that through diligent and investigation the true nature of Ellen’s condition was made known. When her actions were deemed deserving, appropriate care was provided. When her actions became immoral, relief was withdrawn and attempts were made to return her to the straight and narrow. Second, through careful investigation it was discovered that Ellen had family who could provide her with material relief. Taken from Elberfeld principles, the COS asserted that family who were able to help care for those in distress always had the moral responsibility to do

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<sup>354</sup> Community Service Society Archives/Records, 1842-1995, Series V: Charity Organization Society, Box 92 Folder 8: Administration-Criticism of Staff; 1887-1907, Criticism of 9th District; October 28, 1903.

so before any outside care was to be given. This was why investigation was so important so as to identify other sources of help and reduce the burden to the wider community. Lastly, while Ellen McGonigal's case demonstrated the merits of careful investigation it also highlighted the pitfalls that could come when friendly visitors were not fully dedicated to the task at hand. The records of Ellen's case were so meticulous because they were drafted as a criticism of a particular visitor in the original district she lived in. The basis for the criticism centered on how a diligent friendly visitor would have not uncovered the perceived immoral nature of Ellen's life or that she had family willing to help. The case ultimately concluded with not only Ellen and her family being removed from the relief rolls but the resignation of the friendly visitor.

Cases like those of Ellen McGonigal's demonstrate the attempts to better regulate relief to the poor by the COS. One tactic was to distributed educational papers to districts on how best to provide relief to the variety of people friendly visitors would encounter on their investigative trips. One document titled "General Suggestions as to the principles upon which different classes of cases should be treated" distinguished individuals and families based upon the observable characteristics friendly visitors would have been trained to identify. Categories included "Industry & worthy," "Drunken Father," "Drunken Mother," "Drunken Father and Mother," "Lazy Father," "Sick Mother," "Mother and Children deserted by Father," along the more traditional groups of "Widows," "Orphans," and "Old Men and Women." Aid for these groups varied depending upon these investigated conditions and reflected the notions of how to help deserving and undeserving poor. This was at the heart of the COS operation in its investigation of the poor as it worked in "unmasking imposters and exposing the methods of fraudulent charity-mongers."<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> Community Service Society Archives/Records, 1842-1995, Series V: Charity Organization Society, Box 103, A letter from COS NY leadership to COS London Secretary Charles Loch.

The industrious and worthy were “the most difficult“ of cases because the type of relief that should be given was that which did not bring “injury to character.”<sup>356</sup> COS leaders believed that it was this group whose relief needed to be carefully regulated so as not to encourage the idea that relief was a right and therefore cause the industrious and worthy to abandon those characteristics. Therefore, relief focused on ensuring that these individuals could continue to care for their families by returning them to work. Whereas the other groups that displayed an inherent character flaw such as drunkenness or laziness were easily dealt with by providing “no relief, except influence of Friendly Visitor” or by notifying the authorities of their condition (particularly drunkenness or family desertion) to facilitate their arrest and ideally get them back on the straight and narrow.<sup>357</sup> The other more traditional cases of old age and sickness were identified with a tinge more sympathy, as deserving cases typically did, with guidelines to either send them to a hospital or, in the case of widows with young children, “appoint a Friendly Visitor for the family and get them adequate relief---enough to prevent all begging.”<sup>358</sup> The relief was continued “regularly...until her children can help support themselves, but not one day long than is necessary” since this would encourage a sense of entitlement to relief which the COS were so adamant about preventing.<sup>359</sup> Most striking was the category of “Foreign Persons” which claimed that “Foreign persons or families who are likely to be dependent for life should be referred to the Superintendent of Out Door Poor, for the purpose of securing their return to their native countries as “Alien Paupers.””<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Community Service Society Archives/Records, 1842-1995, Series V: Charity Organization Society, Box 92 Folder 1: Administration, “General Suggestions as to the principles upon which different classes of cases should be treated,” 1887.

<sup>357</sup> “General Suggestions as to the principles upon which different classes of cases should be treated.”

<sup>358</sup> “General Suggestions as to the principles upon which different classes of cases should be treated.”

<sup>359</sup> “General Suggestions as to the principles upon which different classes of cases should be treated.”

<sup>360</sup> Community Service Society Archives/Records, 1842-1995, Series V: Charity Organization Society, Box 92 Folder 1: Administration, “General Suggestions as to the principles upon which different classes of cases should be treated,” 1887.

These “General Suggestions” were sent by the Secretary of the COS of New York City, Charles Kellogg, in 1887 to its British counterpart in Liverpool requesting “suggestions” they may have on improving their work in New York. The Liverpool COS Secretary responded in a letter stressing that while “It would be very useful if some general principles of action could be decided upon by those interested in the work of Charity Organisation” he feared that “the conditions under which such work is carried on in America are so different from what they are in England that it would be difficult to find a common basis of action throughout.”<sup>361</sup> He emphasized that the nature of the British Poor Law “enables us to refer all cases that are undeserving or unsatisfactory to be dealt with by the Poor Law Guardians and thus to confine our own efforts to suitably aiding the better class of poor.”<sup>362</sup> This exchange is important because it demonstrates that while the American and British versions of the COS understood themselves to be operating under similar motivating principles the unique nature of national circumstances altered how each entity would go about helping the various identified groups.

This was not the only example of exchange between the British and American versions of the COS. Efforts were taken by the COS of New York to learn the tactics its British counterparts used to encourage more individuals to volunteer and give financially to its efforts. Copies of the COS’s Annual Reports were sent over to the U.S. along with samples of support letters and pamphlets that would be mailed out to targeted recipients who were informed on the growing problem of pauperization within the nation, the motivations and operating principles of the COS, and included donation cards which could be mailed back or brought to the main COS office in

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<sup>361</sup> Community Service Society Archives/Records, 1842-1995, Series V: Charity Organization Society, Box 92 Folder 1: Administration, “Work of General Secretary sent to Liverpool COS; Letter response from Liverpool COS to Charles Kellogg,” 1887.

<sup>362</sup> “Work of General Secretary sent to Liverpool COS.”

London.<sup>363</sup> There were also efforts on the part of COS leadership in both the U.S. and Great Britain to travel to each other's locales and see their efforts in action for themselves. Several of these trips took place in the late nineteenth century with New York COS official Edward Devine traveling to England and Charles Loch traveling to the U.S. Each would write about their experiences and published them in their monthly newsletters or annual reports. More commonly, however, the exchange occurred through the reprinting of speeches or essays of leading COS figures like Octavia Hill and Charles Loch or used as reading material for the training of the society's Friendly Visitors.<sup>364</sup>

Despite the differences mentioned by Charles Loch in his letter to the COS of New York, the American COS operated under very similar circumstances to its British counterpart. The means attracting society's most elite and well-known names as a tool for both legitimacy and to encourage others to give to be associated with these individuals was a common tactic. In 1884, only two years after the society's founding in New York City, figures such as the oil tycoon John D. Rockefeller gave one-hundred dollars to the COS operation. Others included Frank Armstrong Crawford Vanderbilt, the wife of Cornelius Vanderbilt who gave twenty-five dollars that same year.<sup>365</sup> By 1904-1905 it was listed that Rockefeller gave five-thousand dollars to the COS of New York. Prominent donations was not the only use of these notable figures that was copied from the English version of the organization. Prominent figures were also placed in the honorary leadership roles with their names published in the annual reports and other publications. Most notably was John

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<sup>363</sup> Community Service Society Archives/Records, 1842-1995, Series V: Charity Organization Society, Box 92 Folder 1: Administration, COS London- Pamphlet sent out with support letter request, 1891.

<sup>364</sup> Community Service Society Archives/Records, 1842-1995, Series V: Charity Organization Society, Box 99, "Friendly Visitors Course - Z.D, Smith 1898-99."

<sup>365</sup> Community Service Society Archives/Records, 1842-1995, Series V: Charity Organization Society, Box 127 "Funding Raising; Letter of Receipts from donations; 1884." Community Service Society Archives/Records, 1842-1995, Series V: Charity Organization Society, Box 127 "Funding Raising; Letter of Receipts from donations; January 1884."

Pierpont Morgan who was appointed treasurer of the New York COS in 1898 and remained a formidable force within the society's operations until his death in 1913.<sup>366</sup>

The COS was careful to craft a public image of themselves that lauded the work that their charitable efforts helped to organize and the ways in which they helped reduce pauperization and aided the deserving poor. They were ever careful to reach as wide of audience as possible through the publication of news stories, giving speeches, associating themselves with society's elite. Similar to their British counterparts, the American version published annual reports in each of its major locations while also highlighting national commonalities among themselves. This was done in an effort to portray an image that through the scientific charity movement the United States was tackling the problem of poverty in typical American fashion, a common overarching purpose but local control to fit an area's unique circumstances.

## **Conclusion**

The future of the American COS took different paths depending upon its respective city especially as it merged with the other reform movements of the Progressive Era. While there was some coordination between its various manifestations it still reflected America's character in allowing local control to dictate how it operated. Through the avenues of national meetings like the NCCC and the efforts of reformers who traveled to various cities in the U.S. who operated a COS branch a sense of common purpose permeated into a sense of a national organization. The ideas behind the COS spread relatively quickly throughout the United States and by the 1890s most major industrialized cities in the U.S. claimed to have a branch in operation. However, few ever lived up to the exact model that Gurteen created in Buffalo. The New York City COS would

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<sup>366</sup> Community Service Society Archives/Records, 1842-1995, Series V: Charity Organization Society, Box 127 "Special Contributions; 1904-05."

continue to exist through the first two decades of the twentieth century. Overtime, it fell more in line with the larger forces of the Progressive Era, such as getting behind legislation that sought to check unrestricted capitalism and advocated for better conditions for workers. The COS in New York and Philadelphia helped secure the passage of public health measures and tenement house reform. Lowell continued to serve as a major force within the New York organization and fully embraced the Progressive reformer image. Gurteen on the other hand, seemed to grow more disillusioned with the inability of the COS movement to overcome barriers to the successes of the movement or for its principles to truly solve the problem of poverty for those who were deserving. By the late 1880s, somewhat ironically as the COS was taking off throughout the nation, Gurteen had largely abandoned his reform work and returned to a life that was dedicated to academic pursuits. As historian Michael B. Katz eloquently puts it, “Josephine Shaw Lowell resolved the contradictions within organized charity by shifting her efforts to economic reform, organizing women, supporting unions, and fighting for higher wages. Stephen Humphreys Gurteen resolved the tension between the nasty mix of sentimentality and repression in his conception of organized charity by retreating into the mists of Avalon and Camelot.”<sup>367</sup>

The typical assessment of the COS movement in the United States is its failure to achieve the lofty goals the organization espoused. While failure is not an incorrect assessment it focuses too greatly on the outcomes (or lack thereof) of the reformer’s efforts to end mass pauperization. It is evident that while the COS experienced accomplishment in bringing the idea of scientific charity to the U.S., it never fully assumed the same prominence that the Elberfeld System had in Germany or became official welfare policy in the nation. Rather, it became one amongst a host of organizations that sought to mitigate the effects of poverty in the late nineteenth century. However,

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<sup>367</sup> Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 83. The reference to Avalon and Camelot is to the works that Gurteen dedicated himself to in his retirement years.



the transatlantic attention and the desire by reformers to take the principles of the Elberfeld System and implement them within their own national frameworks is of utmost importance. Discussions of degeneration and concern over the poor in nineteenth century reveals the inner apprehensions of modernity and the notion of open-ended progress. Scientific approaches to reform and charity, like the Elberfeld System, helped to function as purveyors of truth and illuminates how reformers sought to answer the Social Question through viable solutions of social regulation and control but within a transnational context. This attention reveals the slippage between the uniqueness of state and national frameworks for tackling poverty on the one hand and the global transformation of capital, labor, and poverty on the other.

Appreciating these distinctions demands an approach that assesses the transfers among industrializing countries in the nineteenth century and considers the mechanisms by which ideas about welfare, and about poverty relief, moved across national borders and between the divides between private and public institutions. Furthermore, the ideas that scientific charity held towards understanding and solving poverty in the late nineteenth century held significant sway on future welfare state development in the twentieth century with its emphasis on investigation into the conditions of the poor and applying rational solutions to seemingly uncontrollable problems. In this way, viewing the poverty management regimes in the major industrial powers of Germany, Great Britain, and the U.S., helps to further our understanding of the globalizing forces that formed modern welfare systems and shaped changing views of poverty in the West.



Figure 5.1: "The Tramp" *Harper's Weekly*, September 2, 1876.

## Conclusion

This work argues that the Elberfeld System was a means by which German, British, and American social reformers sought to solve the problem of poverty that arose in the latter nineteenth century as a result of rapid industrialization that altered social and economic relations in the Western world. The attraction to the Elberfeld System came from its association of being an enlightened form of poor relief that utilized the work of individual poor guardians to investigate the petitions for aid by the poor and determine their deserving nature. The System's adoption of scientific principles, which removed sentimentality, as a guide for relief helped to ensure that provision was fair, necessary, and appropriately distributed. Investigating the condition of the poor, along with their background and habits curbed the anxiety permeating the middle- and upper-classes regarding fears of degeneration amongst societies lower classes. As the System grew in notoriety within Germany, it was, from its beginning, a transnational entity finding its roots first in the free-city of Hamburg in the late eighteenth-century then spreading to Glasgow, Scotland where it became a means of organizing parish relief. Its most significant and successful adoption came in 1853 when, after years of deficiency and collapse of both public and church based poor relief, a group of wealthy industrialists from the German city of Elberfeld took the principles in a new direction.

As the Elberfeld System spread throughout Germany it garnered the attention of British and American social reformers. Through a series of economic, social, and political events in the 1860s and 1870s the limitations of traditional poor relief in Great Britain and the United States drove the need for a reorganization of poor relief on the lines of scientific charity. While Parliamentary officials dabbled with the idea of legally adopting the Elberfeld System in Great Britain, its actual fruition came through the work of the Charity Organization Movement. As it spread to the U.S. by the mid-1870s the Elberfeld System achieved transatlantic notoriety.

By the twentieth century the fate of the Elberfeld System in the three industrial powers varied. In Germany it continued to operate as the main source of local relief in its adopted cities. However, as areas grew in population the increased segmentation of society slowly broke communities into areas based upon socio-economic status and began to damage the sense of responsibility that Elberfeld leaders believed was essential in fostering a communal care for their neighbors. Instead, the work of *Armenpfleger* became increasingly the responsibility of paid social workers and in some cases, women. Just as in Great Britain and the U.S., social work as a vocation for women opened opportunities for occupations and professionalization. The role of social insurance within German society also weighed on the future of the Elberfeld System as calls came for more expansive coverage and the Socialist party emerged as the dominant force in politics by the outbreak of World War I.

The Elberfeld System's success within Great Britain and the U.S. is linked to that of the COS movement. While the COS experienced much proliferation it hardly achieved its stated goals. This has been interpreted by scholars as a failure on the organization's part, but misses the ways that the ideas surrounding the problem of poverty were understood in a transnational context and the solutions that were exchanged amongst reformers on how best to combat poverty. The attention and the desire by reformers to take the principles of the Elberfeld System and implement them within their own national frameworks is of utmost importance. The discussion of degeneration, concerns over the inadequacies of traditional outdoor relief, and anxieties over class conflict in nineteenth century Europe reveals the inner apprehensions of modernity and the notion of open-ended progress. Scientific approaches to reform and charity helped to function as purveyors of truth and thus provided evidence against the lower classes of society. Poor relief, like the Elberfeld System, illuminates how nineteenth century thinkers sought to answer the Social Question through

viable solutions of social regulation and control but within a transnational context. Through an analysis on the inception, structure, and application of the Elberfeld System, and a consideration of its attraction within a transatlantic context demonstrates that the solutions it provided enabled a refashioning of modernity in a way that middle- and upper-class individuals could validate their own values and social norms while also coming to terms with managing its uncertainty.

From start of World War I and throughout its deadly years the conflict permanently altered the nations of Germany, Great Britain, and the United States. So much of the build-up throughout the long nineteenth century towards a never-ending sense of progress came to crashing halt after four years of fighting and the unprecedented loss of life. As the world grappled with the destruction brought by the war, a rising sense of failure washed over Europeans and Americans who could not process what modernity produced. As in most facets of life in the aftermath of World War I, the role that welfare would take in the lives of individuals, Europeans more specifically, looked far different than ever before. The line between the deserving and undeserving poor was indistinguishable as the number of those in need reached levels unprecedented. Additionally, men who had served valiantly returned home with wounds and scars, both visible and invisible, as they sought a return to normalcy with it often escaping them. Governments were at a loss of how to deal with the dislocation and destruction caused by the war often responding in piecemeal ways but none of them sufficient.

Broadly speaking, the Elberfeld System and the transnational application of its principles in Great Britain and the United States helps complicate three prevailing narratives of the history of poverty, the welfare state, and transnational relations in the years before World War I. First is the importance of municipal and private poor relief in the formation of modern welfare states. The prevalence of the Elberfeld System in Germany and the attraction the system garnered from British

and American social reformers challenges the assumption that comprehensive welfare systems developed in the twentieth century were influenced primarily by the passage of social insurance legislation. Claims that downplay the role of poor relief schemes like the Elberfeld System and the COS movement in welfare state development miss the ways that liberals in these three nations sought to respond to the challenges of industrialization while protecting an adherence to laissez-faire principles. Local and private poor relief efforts were the primary means of dealing with a seemingly uncontrollable social problem and to assert that their approach to dealing with poverty ceases to be of influence after the passage of social insurance is wholly inaccurate.

Many of the Elberfeld System's beliefs about knowing the poor to better provide appropriate relief remain throughout the formation of comprehensive welfare system. Furthermore, the fear of indiscriminate giving and applying a scientific foundation to welfare benefits continues as a main feature into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. There is evidence of this approach today, with initiatives that increase government's knowledge of those in need, for example, through the proving of work requirements in order to justify providing health insurance benefits through Medicaid. In June 2018, Arkansas became the first state to require beneficiaries to prove their number of hours worked in order to continue receiving benefits. The initiative targets "nondisabled, working-age, low-income adults" who are individuals believed to be, by welfare critics, the most prone to be undeserving of relief since they are able to work and may choose not to.<sup>368</sup> Beneficiaries lose access to health care, including prescription drugs, if they do not report their working hours. Always cushioned in a rhetoric that emphasizes helping the poor, Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson claimed, "This is not about punishing anyone... It's to help them to

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<sup>368</sup> Benjamin Hardy, "First, Get A Job: Arkansas's Medicaid work requirements begin," in *Arkansas Times*, (June 14, 2018), <https://arktimes.com/news/cover-stories/2018/06/14/first-get-a-job>.

move out of poverty and up the economic ladder.” By November 2018 over 12,000 people were removed from receiving benefits. Most of the stories that have emerged from those who lost coverage demonstrate that it is not from being unwilling to submit their working hours or from not working but due to the poor implementation of the program, the inflexibility of the system, and the available reporting methods.<sup>369</sup> Arkansas is not alone in adding features to better know the poor in helping to determine the worthiness of receiving welfare benefits. Tennessee, Florida, Wisconsin, and Maine are just a few states that have, within the past several years, passed a drug-testing requirement to receive benefits from programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and Women, Infants and Children, all to determine the worthiness of the poor. While these initiatives have proven to be either a waste of tax payer money or created dire circumstances by removing people in need from health care and access to food, they garnered enough support to pass through state legislatures as a means of investigating the condition of the poor and make judgements on their status through those results.<sup>370</sup>

The second narrative this work helps to complicate to the notion that social functions like poor relief and the eventual development of welfare systems are the result of national circumstance. The spread of the Elberfeld System shows an interest in sharing ideas and policies between nations rather than seeing each other as inherently different where nothing could be learned. Just as Daniel Rodgers proves in his work *Atlantic Crossings*, the need to escape the “analytical cage” and transcend “the boundaries of the nation-state” enables scholars to ask new

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<sup>369</sup> Benjamin Hardy, “Locked out of Medicaid: Arkansas's Work Requirement Strips Insurance from Thousands of Working People,” in *Arkansas Times*, (November 19, 2018), <https://arktimes.com/news/cover-stories/2018/11/19/locked-out-of-medicaid-2>.

<sup>370</sup> Darlena Cunha, Why Drug Testing Welfare Recipients Is a Waste of Taxpayer Money, in *Time Magazine*, (August, 15, 2014), <http://time.com/3117361/welfare-recipients-drug-testing/>.

questions on the origins of shared social policy.<sup>371</sup> While Rodgers' work focuses on the Progressive Era in the 1890s through 1930s, this work finds transnational connections of reform issues circulating much earlier through the traumatic events of the 1860s and 1870s. Ultimately this work demonstrates that perceptions of poverty and social policy are the result of dynamic transnational trends and encounters occurring earlier than traditional periodization of the Progressive Era.

The final narrative that this work helps to complicate has less to do with poor relief per se and more with the transnational relationship created as a result of social reform measures which challenges the argument of escalating tensions in the years leading to 1914. Particularly for Great Britain and Germany, the years leading to WWI are typically portrayed as an era of increased rivalry and competition between the two nations. These feelings helped to foster a sense of separation between the major powers, encouraging a sense of antagonism helping make Europe ripe for a nationalist conflict like WWI. While these feelings hold some merit in certain spheres of German and British life, it does not mean that this feeling was totalizing. Rather for social reformers the years before WWI fostered greater connections given how much they held in common. For example, female German social reformer Alice Solomon, known for her transnational reform activities and considered the German Jane Addams, was in Ireland when the Great War conflict broke out and found herself stranded there for six weeks. As Andrew Lees notes, "She was far from enthusiastic about German participation in the conflict, and she did not let it prevent her from making determined efforts to maintain contacts with fellow feminists outside Germany even as war raged."<sup>372</sup> Using Solomon as an example, it is evident that reformers interpreted the conflict as a disruption to their attempts at learning from another in the realm of

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<sup>371</sup> Daniel Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1998), 2.

<sup>372</sup> Andrew Lees, *Cities, Sin, and Social Reform in Imperial Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 317.



social politics. Therefore the perspective that views the years leading to 1914 as ones consumed with antagonism misses the ways those feelings were absent in the world of social reformers.

As this project has illuminated new avenues of transnational reform and exchange in matters of poor relief add to a growing interest in transnational phenomenon and networks. There are still avenues of inquiry left to explore. One important area in need of investigation is the connection between the spread of Elberfeld in Germany, the growth of the COS movement in England and the U.S., and the role of imperialism. For instance, how does imperialism play into ideas about the poor at home? Additionally, is the imperial colony a place that Elberfeld principles were exported to? Most intriguingly would be an investigation on how reformers perceived cultural links between their colonial subjects and those defined as vagrants or tramps at home in the metropole. There is evidence to support the argument that, within the German context, reformers viewed their colonial subjects and vagrants as more similar than different despite their racial or geographic separations.<sup>373</sup> The attempt to regulate workers at home and abroad exposes the coercive nature of global capitalism in a period of immense imperial and economic growth.

Another area for investigation is the role between the Elberfeld System, scientific charity, and the acquisition of data used by municipal officials and charity workers. The Elberfeld System's operation of investigation of the poor comprised asking questions and compiling massive records that included details of occupations, extended family members, addresses, membership in associations and the habits of the individual. This information was used to build a case of the petitioner to determine their worthiness and chronicle their progress. It would be intriguing to explore how this process of acquiring and maintaining immense amounts of data would influence

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<sup>373</sup> This has been explored in part in Sebastian Conrad, *Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

the same practice by governments in the twentieth century. Also worth considering is how the investigative data used in the COS was influential in data collection for immigration processing, specifically at Ellis Island.

A final area for greater analysis is the connection between poor relief schemes like that of Elberfeld and the growth of public health initiatives. By the late nineteenth century, concerns over diseases like Tuberculosis, Typhoid, and Cholera and their spread among society's lower-classes made it equal to the fears of degeneration that social reformers held. The work of poor guardians and friendly visitors enabled them to come into direct contact with those suffering from diseases, with sickness a frequent cause for relief petitions. The area for analysis would be between these relief officials, the data they collected, and how that information was used with public health authorities. As the field of social work continued to develop many public health officials also served as friendly visitors. Illuminating the connection between these two reform efforts would demonstrate not only how the issues of poverty and health are closely intertwined but also the transnational dimensions between poor relief, public health, social control, and welfare state development.

Despite the new arguments that this work offers, there are limitations on what can be gleaned about the history of poverty and welfare. Any narrative focusing on those outside the realms of power, such as the poor, struggle to adequately convey their voice. This is particularly true for those who were on the receiving end of the Elberfeld System's harsh inquisition into their lives and had little means by which to resist if they hoped to receive relief. In Germany this took on a unique dynamic given that the Elberfeld System was an operation of the government making it difficult for the poor to find ways to easily resist or show their discontentment. The most obvious way for the poor to demonstrate their agency was through supporting working-class associations

and Socialist political parties. The voice of the poor in how they felt about the Elberfeld System in particular is hard to hear given the sources that remain, which are largely municipal records. These types of records recount the intricacies of how the System operated but spend little time on the poor themselves. Little, if nothing, survives of the records that *Armenpfleger* acquired through their investigations.

In Great Britain and the U.S., the voices of the poor are muffled but not as greatly as in Germany. The records of the New York COS, for example, include significant notes of case summaries that detail the interactions friendly visitors have with the poor. These illuminate the experiences of the poor despite being filtered through the perspective of the visitor. There are also several examples of critics speaking out against COS methods, waste of resources, and questioning whether or not its approach actually helped the poor.<sup>374</sup> Most striking was death of a family recounted in the New York Times in June 1912. The story was of Mrs. Gabrielle Werner, a widow, her twenty-six year old son Ansel, and his two year daughter Yvonne, who were driven to a murder-suicide pact after having lost almost everything through widowhood and a long spat of unemployment for Ansel. Several weeks before the tragic end, the family reached out to the COS for help which had “deeply humiliated” Mrs. Werner and she “begged...to have the fact that she had done so kept a secret.”<sup>375</sup> It was unclear what aid had been given and the COS “declined...to say what help had been extended to Mrs. Werner, giving as the reason that this was a confidential matter.”<sup>376</sup> While “It was intimated that some slight help had been extended” it was obviously not enough to assuage the anxiety Mrs. Werner and her family felt. Weeks after Mrs. Werner’s initial

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<sup>374</sup> See Sherman Montrose Craiger, “The Scandal of Organized and Expensive Charity” in *New York Times*, (July 9, 1911); Community Service Society Archives/Records, 1842-1995, Series V: Charity Organization Society, Box 155: Press and Social Work; The New York Morning Telegraph, January 8, 1911; “Society for the Congealing of Charity”;

<sup>375</sup> “Poverty Brings end to Family of Three.” in *New York Times* (June 5, 1912).

<sup>376</sup> “Poverty Brings end to Family of Three.”

request for help she mailed a postcard to the COS “investigator” assigned to her case stating “When you get this note we will be dead. It was too much. Please say nothing in the house that I was talking to you.”<sup>377</sup> The burden of poverty and the shame of reaching out to the COS was too much for the Werner family to bear. While this example demonstrates an extreme illustration of the pressures poverty created for individuals it also explicates the depths of despair and humiliation the poor felt towards poor relief schemes like that of the Elberfeld System and COS movement.

The challenges of bringing light to the voices of the poor leave any analysis on the history of poverty and welfare state development stunted. Yet this work has sought to focus on those upper- and middle-class individuals who believed that through their socio-economic station they had the right to help improve the lives of the poor through investigation and instruction. The Elberfeld System and the transnational application of its principles in Germany, Great Britain, and the U.S. illuminates how those in power sought to respond to the changing nature of poverty in the late nineteenth century through municipal and private relief efforts. Ultimately, this work argues that those initiatives were fundamental in helping form modern welfare systems and, in turn, how many of those same ideas continued to influence the way poverty is understood today.

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<sup>377</sup> “Poverty Brings end to Family of Three.”

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